Day 1 of ban: 48 arrested; 50 guns seized

By Jocelyn R. Uy and Inquirer Bureaus

AT LEAST 48 PEOPLE HAVE FALLEN IN the first 24 hours and police say the number could soar in the next several weeks.

Of the 48 violators of the nationwide election gun ban so far arrested, three were government officials, five were police officers, and four were military personnel, Director Andres Caro II, the Philippine National Police director for operations, said yesterday.

Altogether, 50 firearms were seized.

DAY 1 A4

SPORTS / A14

PSA names
Pacquiao Athlete of the Decade

BUSINESS / B1

Gov't to tap
euro bond market in February

ACROSS / A13

Use of P750-M
windfall irks Vizcaya folk

LIFESTYLE / C1

Artist walks
from Pagudpud to Sorsogon for cancer warriors

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Tuesday, January 12, 2010 ★★ 5 sections / Vol. 23 / No. 35 P18

Bishop notes 'ominous' signs for May 10 polls

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

THE IMPORTED counting machines have been arriving in trickles, government websites have been hacked with routine

BISHOP A2

Human rights raps filed against 24 cops

CHR: Policemen turned Parañaque into war zone

36 BULLETS Alfonso de Vera and his 7-year-old daughter Lea were shot dead by mistake by policemen in hot pursuit of a heavily armed gang of robbers on Dec. 5, 2005, in Parañaque City.

KODE.PHOTOS

By Nikko Dizon

LILIAN DE VERA, WIDOW of one of the victims, left home in Pangasinan at 4 a.m. yesterday for the three-hour trip to Manila to listen to the announcement by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) of its findings at a press conference.

The trip was worth it, De Vera said, because she was able to find help from the CHR in pursuing the multiple-murder case she had filed against more than 50 police personnel, including ranking officers, in the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The CHR has found that police operatives committed multiple human rights violations in a shoot-out with alleged robbers in Parañaque more than a year ago that left six civilians, including Lilian's husband, a returning overseas Filipino worker, and their 7-year-old daughter dead.

The CHR recommended the filing of charges against 24 officers of the Philippine National Police for the carnage.

In a resolution dated Jan. 5, which CHR Chair Leila de Lima released at the press conference, the commission also recommended policy reforms in the PNP to prevent a repeat of the incident.

"Those [basic] rights were ignored and deemed inconsistent on the night of Dec. 5, 2005, in United Parañaque Subdivision-4, Parañaque, not because the civilians in the area were mistaken for criminals by the police. It was because duty were presumed to be criminals and this seems to have been taken by the police operatives as justification for the use of force of such magnitude."

HUMAN RIGHTS A4

INVESTIGATORS inspect the high-powered firearm of a suspected Waray Waray gang member killed by policemen in Barangay Marcelo Green, Parañaque City, on Dec. 5, 2005. The Napolcom later said rules of engagement were violated.

PNP recalls 1,600 cops guarding 700 VIPs

By Marlon Ramos

AS ELECTION FEVER HEATS UP, THE Philippine National Police has pulled out over 1,600 police escorts providing security to some 700 VIPs and other individuals under threat.

The unprecedented move was in compliance with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) order on the use of security escorts during the election period, Chief Supt. Lina Sarmiento, head of the Police Security and Protection Group (PSPG), said yesterday.

Sarmiento said that those who want to keep their escorts should apply with the Comelec for authorization and pay a P5,000 application fee.

Considering the number of candidates, she said some 6,000 individuals might apply for security escorts.

The Comelec would earn at least P30 million from the application fees.

PNP RECALLS A6

Live coverage of Ampatuan trial sought

By Cathy Yamsuan

THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALists of the Philippines (NUJP) wants the presiding judge in the murder trial of Andal Ampatuan Jr. to allow live coverage of the hearings to ensure transparency and dispel fears of a cover-up.

NUJP director Wenyi Baraan announced plans to write Judge Jocelyn Solis-Reyes of Branch 221 of the Quezon City Regional Trial Court at yesterday's launch of the People's Task Force on Maguindanao at the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP).

The task force seeks to coordinate all resources and efforts of legal groups and media organizations to ensure that justice is served in the Nov. 23 massacre of 57 people in Maguindanao.

Ampatuan, the mayor of Datu Unsay town and namesake son of the powerful former Maguindanao governor, is the prime suspect in the slaughter.

Baraan said that Supreme Court

JOURNALISTS A6

Melo says GMA cannot appoint new SC chief

By Jerome Aning, Philip C. Tubeza and Ed C. Cabucungan Jr.

ELECTIONS CHAIR JOSE MELO, A RETired Supreme Court associate justice, said President Macapagal-Arroyo should not appoint the successor to Chief Justice Reynato Puno.

"To me, it should be the next president [who should name the next Chief Justice]. It would be like a midnight appointment if the next President would not do it," Melo told reporters.

Asked if Ms Arroyo could legally name a successor to Chief Justice Puno, the head of the Commission on Elections replied, "I doubt it, because we have a prohibition."

Melo was reacting to the debate sparked by the claim of former Senate President Franklin Drilon that the Supreme Court had ruled that the President "was neither required to make appointments to the courts nor allowed to do so during the last 90 days of his/her term."

Ms Arroyo's allies countered that the President could name Puno's replacement.

Puno, who was appointed by President Fidel V. Ramos in 1990 to the high tribunal, is set to retire on May 17 or 45 days before Ms Arroyo steps down from the presidency.

He is the only member of the 15-

MELO A5

Bush raring to see Pacman fight at new Dallas arena

EVEN FORMER US PRESIDENT George W. Bush—once the world's most powerful man—is raring to see Manny Pacquiao fight.

Pacquiao promoter Bob Arum on Sunday said he had finalized a deal for his Filipino star to fight Obama's Joshua Clottey—not the unbeaten Floyd Mayweather Jr.—in a welterweight bout on March 13 at the new $1.2-billion Cowboys Stadium in Texas.

"Too bad you didn't get Mayweather, but what difference does it make?" Arum quoted Bush as telling

BUSH A9

GO ARTIST Ghanian Joshua Clottey has 35 wins (26 KOs) and three losses.

DALLAS DATE Manny Pacquiao will be fighting in a brand-new stadium that can seat 80,000 fans.

SC ruling on cities may cause havoc, says justice

By Norman Bordadora

SENIOR ASSOCIATE JUSTICE Antonio Carpio has warned of a destabilized government once the Supreme Court's decision upholding the 16 cityhood laws of 16 municipalities becomes final and executory.

In his dissenting opinion supported by three other justices, Carpio said any ruling that a tied vote could reverse a prior majority decision "would wreak havoc on well-settled jurisprudence of this court."

The Supreme Court gave due course to a second motion for reconsideration filed by the municipalities aspiring to become cities on Dec. 22 last year, when it ruled that the 8-8 vote deadlock among its members sustained a divided court.

Voting 8-8 this time, the tribunal reversed itself and affirmed that the cityhood laws

JUSTICE A5

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Southern Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao will have mostly cloudy skies and scattered rainshowers or thunderstorms brought by northeast winds and a partly cloudy skies. The rest of Luzon will be partly cloudy to cloudy skies with scattered light rain.

Second FRONTPAGE

PCSO

2D: 12 18 31 3 19 6
6/55: 3 2 6 3 8
4D: 8 2 7 7 8 8 0
MEGA 6/45: 3 6 13 20 31 38
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Aquino lying about past, says Villar

'He forgets Nacionalistas were at forefront of probes into GMA scandals'

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE WORD WAR CONTINUES

Nacionalista Party (NP) standard-bearer Sen. Manuel Villar yesterday accused Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III of "lying" or forgetting the past when the Liberal Party presidential candidate said the other day that Villar was not tough enough on the Arroyo administration over its many scandals.

"You know, he is lying again. He knows that the three big investigations against President Arroyo were done by Nacionalistas. I myself led the investigation into Jueteng, which was a big scandal," Villar said in an interview over radio station dzSt.

His party mates, former Cavite representative and now senatorial candidate Gilbert Remulla and Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano were at the forefront of the inquiries into the "Hello, Garci" scandal and the ZTE-the tossed Broadband Network contract, Villar added.

"That is why it is saddening that one friend apparently has forgotten... because all the investigations against the President came from me," he said.

He said the NP did not shirk from developing a relationship with the Arroyo administration, while Aquino's Liberal Party (LP) did not launch any major investigation after it helped oust him (Villar) from the first presidency.

Villar said Aquino's allegations made him "laugh...because it appears he does not know what is happening...the LP has not done anything as big" as the inquiries launched by the Nacionalistas.

"Now, I have nothing to say in the senate now that I am no longer the Senate president. But when I was still president, we could boast that the Senate of the Philippines was free and independent," Villar said.

Cayetano said the NP and LP both fought against corruption but it was the NP that led in investigating the major scandals.

In a press conference, Cayetano also came to Villar's defense. "Didn't we have Joker Arroyo accused? Didn't we proceed with the ZTE and fertilizer issue even when the administration did not want it? But when they removed Senator Villar from the Senate presidency, it was no longer President Arroyo whom they investigated. Not Senator Villar," Cayetano said.

Cayetano said Villar had a quiet, gentlemanly demeanor, but "senior speak louder than words."

"You can be a gentleman while also going after bad administrations. Insensible and angry. I think there is no doubt about Villar being an opposition," Cayetano said.

In Cebu, Villar continued his offensive against Aquino. In an interview, he reiterated how he and the other NP senators led the big investigations into corruption scandals.

"Any among us, reason for reason," Villar said. (My question to whom was he (Aquino) IP?)

Villar also expressed confidence that his survey ratings would continue to rise as the election nears. Villar signed a covenant of alliance with Cebu 1st District Rep. Eduardo Gullas of the Lakas party. The mayors and barangay captains of six local government units in the 1st district (Talisay City, Minglanilla, San Fernando, Carcar City, Naga City and Sibonal) attended the event at the Dalias-owned University of Visayas stadium.

Bongbong fires broadside at Noynoy

By Robert Gonzaga (a Central Luzon) and Gil Cabacungan Jr. (in Manila)

DUMAGUETE CITY—THE BATTLE of dirty cliches has been revived as Bossa Norte Rep. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. criticized Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III's qualification for seeking the presidency.

Marcos, candidate for senator of the Nacionalista Party and son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, said Aquino, the Liberal Party standard-bearer, has none of the qualities of a president.

"It's very hard to answer Aquino because there is too much to answer to. He has very little record to speak of," Marcos told the bayanan here on Saturday.

Marcos said Aquino, son of slain opposition leader Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr. and the late President Corazon Aquino, "has no strong achievements anything."

"It's hard to answer what kind of administration he'll have," he said.

Marcos, whose father jailed Aquino's father during martial law, said candidates for president were normally judged by their records of public service.

Marcos said he chose to run on the ticket of Sen. Manuel Villar Jr. because the senator "had done something great in his own life."

"He was able to rise from poverty and become one of the biggest businessmen in the country. He knows how to run a large organization, he can understand the conditions of workers. So the governance of this country I," he said. "That's the difference (between Aquino and Villar)."

Marcos was in this city on Saturday to attend the birthday party of former Zamboanga Gov. Vicente Magsaysay and his daughter-in-law, Rep. Milagros Magsaysay, both members of the administration Lakas-Kampi-CMD party.

Marcos, however, said he could not cross party lines and endorse the Magsaysays.

"I am here as a personal friend and have been for a very long time. He was really close to my father. When we were in Hawaii...he was almost like a secretary to him. That kind of relationship is not something you forget just within 30. (The Magsaysays) can count on us. We owe them so much in terms of support and loyalty," he said.

Meanwhile, Marcos yesterday warned that Villar could be the next victim of an assassination attempt, after four members of the NP were gunned down in separate incidents in recent weeks.

Satisfaction with administration at all-time low, survey finds

PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH THE PERformance of President Macapagal-Arroyo's administration reached an all-time low last December, a Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey showed.

Of the 1,200 adult Filipinos interviewed from Dec. 5 and Dec. 13, 28 percent said they were satisfied with the overall performance of the administration, while 51 percent said they were dissatisfied, for a "poor" net rating (satisfied minus dissatisfied) of minus 23, a further dip in the rating the administration received in September (minus 20).

The semi-monthly survey had a margin of error (margin of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points).

The Arroyo administration has been receiving negative net satisfaction ratings since December 2003 (when it had a minus 11). Its rating improved in December 2008 (minus one), but went back to double-digit negative figures in the succeeding quarters.

SWS also asked respondents if they were satisfied with the administration's performance on specific issues.

Of the 14 issues tested, the performance of the national administration was very good on one issue, moderate on four issues, neutral on six issues, and poor on three issues," SWS said in a statement released yesterday.

The Arroyo administration got a "very good" net rating of plus 51 on helping victims of disasters.

It obtained moderate ratings on being prepared for natural calamities (plus 27), promoting the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (plus 26, up seven points from last September's plus 19), ensuring that medicines are affordable (plus 20, up two points), and helping the poor (plus 17, up seven points).

Ratings were neutral on fighting corruption (plus four, four points), encouraging agents illegal drugs (minus three, down six points), reconciliation with Muslim rebels (minus four, down seven points), reconciliation with communist rebels (minus five, down eight points) fighting crime (minus nine, down one point) and fighting inflation (minus nine, up 13 points).

The survey administration received poor ratings on ensuring there was no hunger (minus 15, down five points), suppressing politicians with private armies in Mindanao (minus 17), and eradicating graft and corruption (minus 27, up one point).

Survey respondents were also asked their opinion on the government's response to the Sept. 23 massacre of 57 people in Maguindanao.

"[The survey] found mixed opinions on what the government had done up to that point to resolve the Maguindanao massacre case," SWS said.

Forty-one percent were satisfied with the government's response and 44 percent were dissatisfied, for a neutral net rating of minus two (difference due to rounding off).

Fifteen percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Cyrell L. Rosabella, Inquirer Research

NSC's first meet in 5 years to tackle private armies, arms

By Jeffrey M. Tupas in Mindanao and Christian V. Esguerra in Manila

DAVAO CITY—FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2005, President Macapagal-Arroyo will convene today the National Security Council (NSC). Former Presidents Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada are expected to attend.

On top of the agenda are private armies and the proliferation of loose firearms, according to Defense Secretary Norberto Gonzales.

In a statement, Estrada said he would attend the NSC meeting today to show that politics can take a back seat to the highest interests of national security and orderly elections.

"By attending the meeting, he hopes to contribute in his own way as a former president and as a concerned citizen, on these issues that he feels strongly about," Marquez Lukeba, Estrada's spokesperson, said in a statement yesterday.

The meeting is set for 10 a.m. at Bonoan Hall at Malacañang.

Estrada is running for president again in the May 10 election, after he was ousted two years into his term in 2001 by People Power II.

Gonzales, who attended the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC) general assembly here Friday along with the leadership of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said the NSC meeting was an offshoot of the gathering of leaders of the Catholic, Protestant and Muslim religious leaders in Mindanao.

The government had sought the help of the BUC in its campaign against loose firearms and private armies. One of the measures proposed was for the government to conduct house-to-house searches for firearms.

"We are asking the Ulamas to help the military convince political leaders to dismantle their private armies and surrender their firearms," Gonzales said.

The presence of loose firearms and private armies has major implications on the elections in May. These two issues were highlighted following the Nov. 23 Maguindanao massacre in which 57 civilians, 30 of them journalists, were killed. The main suspects in the massacre are Maguindanao Gov. Andal Ampatuan Sr. and his sons.

Gonzales said he spoke with President Macapagal-Arroyo before the BUC meeting.

"She said that maybe this was the better approach, that we first begin a dialogue among important or significant sectors of our society on left, as the candidates one of the more important issues confronting the country," he said.

The defense chief noted that today's NSC meeting will be the first in five years.

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Christmas bonus on the way–DepEd

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DepEd) yesterday said it would be able to give public school teachers the rest of their P10,000 Christmas bonus this month.

In a statement, the DepEd said it had already paid out P7,000 of the promised Productivity Enhancement Incentive (PEI) as each of its 550,000 teaching and non-teaching personnel.

"The balance of P2,000 is now being processed for payment this January as the Department of Budget and Management has already released to DepEd the monies of each allocation necessary to cover the payment," the department said.

Turkey public school teachers spree

Meanwhile, the bonus for 800 teachers in Bodrigues, Rizal, amounting to P4.9 million that was taken by armed soldiers will be replaced, the DepEd announced. Philjo C. Tolosa

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Human rights raps filed against 20 cops

From page A1

the CHR said.

The commission said the PNP turned the exhibition's main session into a war zone and treated everyone on it as an enemy combatant.

"This explains the complete breakdown in the protection of the human rights of the civilian residents," it added.

Incompetence, brutality

After an investigation and several public inquiries into the shoot-out, the CHR concluded that the police operatives against the suspected robbers "was not only a blatant display of police incompetence ... but also a show of blatant disregard for standard operating procedures, brazen public brutality and reckless disregard for human life," the CHR said in a statement.

The commission claimed the lives of Alfonso de Vera, his daughter Ann Marxinne, their wake employee Rodolfo Estabaya, Jessrey Rasmayan, Ronel Mayaluwan and Bernard Tingcab.

Also killed were PO1 Hiram Manuoy of the PNP Special Action Force (SAF) and nine suspected members of the Wanay Wanay and Onamin gangs.

Rajiv Monsanto Gutierrez of the PNP Highway Patrol Group (HPG) was seriously wounded.

On the night of Dec. 5 two years ago, members of the SAF and HPG were on a mission at the United Paraiso Subdivision 4 in Barangay Marvelo Green, following a tip that members of the Wanay Wanay and Onamin gangs were about to rob a warehouse in the area.

Riddled with bullets

Alfonso and Lea Marxinne were on their way to pick up Ann when their vehicle was riddled with bullets allegedly by policemen who thought that their Isuzu Crosswind was one of the robbers' vehicles.

Estabaya's motorcycle was commandeered by an escaping gang member on South Luzon Expressway when the police shot at both of them.

The bodies of Tingcab, Mayaluwan and Rasmayan were discovered in different areas of the subdivision that the CHR said should have been cordoned off for the police operation.

Criminal charges

For the deaths of De De Vera and Estabaya, the CHR recommended the filing of criminal and administrative charges against the following HPG members: Chief Inspectors Joel Mendoza and Lawrence Lapiz, Inspectors Gerardo Balaoing and Dominic Tolentino, PO3s John Marinduque Jr., Fernando Rey Lagos, Aaron Rasion, Roberto Gandira and Jesse Pascual, PO2s Eduardo Blanco, Ishmir Amilan, Fidel Quitoyen and John Ida, and PO1s Joel Rey Lawsin, Ryhner Catalan, Jayson Galimba and Wilfredo Reyes.

The CHR recommended the filing of criminal charges against Director Nicholas Bidoy (regional director of PNP-Calabarzon), Director Orlando Mahinay (HPG chief) and Supt. James Untalasi for obstruction of justice, dereliction of duty and for failing to produce, if not concealing, the firearms of the HPG hosts used in the killing of the De Veras.

For post-inquisition resulting in the killing of the six civilians, the CHR recommended the filing of administrative charges against Untalasi, Chief Inspectors Michael Sarmiento and Francisco Lucero Jr., Insp. Leo Isnol and SPO4 Danny Borja.

The CHR said it would continue to gather more evidence to determine who was culpable for the deaths of Tingcab, Mayaluwan and Rasmayan.

Unbelievable narration

The CHR castigated the members of the police operation and their superiors "for rendering incredible and unbelievable narration of the events surrounding the deaths of the De Veras" in which the police claimed that it was the suspected gang members who peppered the family's vehicle with bullets.

De Lima described the CHR resolution as "exhaustive and fact-intensive" to allow the prosecutor-led action of the government such as the DOJ and the Office of the Ombudsman to "fully appreciate the import of our findings."

Lacking prosecutorial powers, the CHR can only recommend the filing of charges against those who have committed human rights violations.

"Theoretically, the agencies with prosecutorial powers can adopt or reject, or adopt with modifications, our recommendations that we feel that in one or like this, we had an exhaustive investment of the case. We have high hopes they will adopt our recommendations," De Lima told the Inquirer.

Review procedures

The CHR urged the PNP to undertake a comprehensive review of its operational procedures to make them more responsive to and compliant with human rights requirements specifically on the protection of civilians.

It also asked the PNP to coordinate with close cooperation on measures accountability of its officers.

A teary-eyed Lilian, 63, said she had been waiting for the DOJ resolution since November last year.

"Sa hope kits. De lera would somehow feel some relief. We know how painful it is to lose your loved ones in that manner," De Lima said at the press conference while she asked a staff member to hand the widow a copy of the CHR resolution.

Going to church daily

Lilian has been staying with an older sister in Pangasinan since she lost her husband and daughter. She goes to church daily and does extra cooking to keep herself busy.

The CHR recommendation may be used in the PNP probe of the shoot-out, according to a police spokesperson.

"We have yet to receive a copy of the CHR report, but it would be considered in the [the PNP Internal Affairs Service (IAS) investigation," Senior Insp. Kimberly Gonzales, PNP deputy spokesperson, said in a briefing in Camp Crame.

The IAS investigators, Gonzales said, was about the punitive administrative liabilities of the policemen who participated in the shoot-out.

All the PNP personnel, who were removed after the controversial gunfight, are still assigned to their respective units, Gonzales said. *With a report from Jikhan Ramos*

What Went Before

ON THE MORNING OF DEC. 5, 2009, suspected members of the Wanay Wanay and Onamin gangs engaged policemen in a **shoot-out inside a subdivision** in Paraiaspe City.

At the end of the 45-minute gun battle, 15 people lay dead, including 10 alleged robbers and six civilians.

Leopoldo Bataoil, then chief of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO), described the shoot-out as the "bloodiest fire fight between the police and criminal elements in the Metro Manila."

Among the civilians killed were 53-year-old Alfonso de Vera and his 7-year-old daughter Lea Myrraine. Witnesses said the De Veras were killed by police who apparently mistook their Isuzu Crosswind as one of the getaway cars of the suspected robbers.

Initial findings showed that about 80 bullets pierced the De Veras and their vehicle.

The other civilians killed were Bernard Tingcab, Jessrey Mayaluwan and Ronel Rasmayan.

Operatives of the Philippine National Police's Highway Patrol Group (HPG), PNP Special Action Force, NCRPO and Southern Police District were sent to the United Paraiaspe Subdivision 4, following a tip

LONG UNBURDEN. Relatives of Barangay Marvelo Green in Paraiaspe City view the bodies of suspected members of the Wanay Wanay gang on Dec. 5, 2009. NOEL ALMAZAN/INQ

that a warehouse of the fourth-era Stampin' Co. in the subdivision would be robbed.

On Dec. 11, 2009, the Senate Public Order Committee (Nepo) ruled that the PNP violated the rules of engagement when it failed to install lookouts that would have prevented civilians from an unexpected shoot-out.

The Napolcom also noted there was no ambulance on standby to attend to those who would be hurt.

On Feb. 17, 2009, the Commission on Human Rights, which was conducting a separate probe, threatened to cite in contempt 33 HPG members for failing to attend a public hearing on the shoot-out.

Two days later, the PNP limited Allan Purisima (BSO) charged nine HPG members with grave misconduct and neglect of duty, and dropped eight others with dismissal for giving false testimony.

DOJ Usec Lilibeth Cabuay was charged with grave misconduct and dismissed from service for ordering that a bullet recovered near the slain De Vera's head was fired from Calauyan's .45-cal. pistol.

Cabuayan had told the IAG that he was 2 kilometers away from De Vera's vehicle at the time of the shoot-out.

On April 1, 2009, the police were charged by the DOJ appointed as a CHR public hearing but invoked their right to remain silent. Cyrill Almendras, Inquirer Research

Sources: Inquirer Archives

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Respectfully returned to the Director Bureau of Corrections, Muntinlupa City, forwarding APPROVING the recommendations of the composite Prosecution Panel and Panel of Experts, Committee of Investigation for Prisons (CIP) for the amendment/modification of the parameters of Section 6 and Section 7 (a & b), Chapter 5, Rule II of the BUCOR Operations Manual. As accordingly, Section 6 pars. B, and Section 7 pars. a & b, Chapter 5, Pool III of the BuCor Operating Manual shall now read as follows:

"SEC 6 – Criteria – xxx

xxx

b. Any second imprisonment with good conduct for a period equivalent to one (1) year of the maximum term of the prison sentence or five (5) years in the case of life sentences and those whose sentence were computed as ten (10) years or less;

" SEC 7. – Privileges of a colonist – A colonist shall have the following privileges:

a. credit of an additional GCTA of ten (10) days for each subsequent month for window and classification under from the regular GCTA authorized under Article 97 of the Revised Penal Code;

b. automatic reduction of sentence to thirty (30) years for colonists deprived with the life sentence or other sentences were computed as thirty (30) years;

xxx

It is hereby understood that the aforementioned proposed implementing guidelines shall be favorably considered to apply to all pending and future cases.

The foregoing amendments/modifications to the BUCOR Operations Manual shall take effect fifteen (15) days after date of submission thereof to the OIC Law Center and its complete publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

AGNES VST DEVANADERA
Acting Secretary

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Tuesday, January 12, 2010
1st Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: 1 Sm 1:9-20
Gospel: Mk 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went into the town of Capernaum and from began to teach in the synagogue during the Sabbath assemblies. The people were astonished at the way he taught, for he spoke as one having authority and not like the teachers of the Law.

It happened that a man with an evil spirit was in their synagogue and he shouted, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: You are the Holy One of God." Then Jesus faced him and said with authority, "Be silent and come out of this man!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and, with a loud shriek, came out of him. All the people were astonished and they wondered, "What is this? With what authority he preaches! He even orders evil spirits and they obey him!" And Jesus' fame spread throughout all the country of Galilee.

Commentary

"The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law, he taught with authority."

- Authority comes from living what we talk about.
- It is one thing to know the Law. It is entirely another to embody the spirit of it.
- Father Hans simply invites us to keeping Jesus company.
- Jesus breathed the very spirit of the Law: love, mercy, justice, peace and so much so.

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NBI to probe hacking into gov't websites

By Jeannette I. Andrade

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) has launched an investigation into the hacking of government websites.

Agency investigators suspect a single perpetrator is responsible for the vandalism.

NBI Anti-Fraud and Computer Crimes Division head agent Palmer Mallari said the bureau would investigate the hacking into the websites of the Department of Health, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda), National Disaster Coordinating Council and Department of Social Welfare and Development.

"The same hacker could have defaced the websites although there is a possibility involved in the agencies committed the vandalism," Mallari said, adding that the hackers had the means to unmask the perpetrators.

"From the web hosts and creators of the sites, we can identify the IP addresses used by the hackers. We will also be coordinating with the telecommunication companies in this internet igration," he said.

He said the NBI would be able to determine if the government websites were secure or not to begin with.

If the sites were not secure, they would have been vulnerable to hacking. If they were secure, the Internet vandals hacked into the websites simply for the challenge or to prove their skills, Mallari said.

He said that all angles, including commercial, economic and political ones, would be looked into.

Flying V hikes fuel prices by P1

FLYING V PHILIPPINES HAS RAISED prices of gasoline, kerosene and diesel by P1 a liter, effective 12:01 a.m. today, to reflect the increase in the prices of petroleum products in the world market.

According to Flying V spokesperson Joey Uriat, today's price hike did not reflect Executive Order No. 818, which reduced the tariff on petroleum products to zero from 3 percent.

The order is expected to result in a one-time 75-centavo a liter rollback in fuel prices, according to Energy Secretary Angelo T. Reyes.

In a phone interview, Uriat said Flying V would implement or consider the executive order in its price adjustments until such time "that we realize the application of the new tariff in the products that we are selling."

Other oil companies have yet to announce their respective price adjustments as of press time.

In a related development, a Manila judge yesterday granted a motion to temporarily restrain the Big 3 oil firms from raising prices of petroleum products "almost on a weekly basis."

Judge Silvino Pampilo Jr. dismissed for lack of merit a motion to issue a temporary restraining order (TRO) sought by the Social Justice Society (SJS) against Chevron Philippines Inc., Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. and Petron Corp.

In his three-page order, Pampilo said, "Although this court sympathizes with the cry of the masses and the mounting stability of the government to act and remedy the situation, this court cannot issue an injunctive relief to stop oil price increases absent any factual or legal basis."

Reports from Amy R. Remo and Jeannette I. Andrade

Day 1 of ban: 48 arrested; 50 guns seized

From page A1

from the violators who were nabbed at various checkpoints around the country.

"We are requesting the figures to rise in the coming days," PNP spokesperson Chief Supt. Leonardo Espina said in a phone interview.

Previous years

Comparatively a total of 413 people were arrested in 2004 for carrying deadly weapons in violation of the election gun ban, according to the Inquirer archives.

During the 2007 election period, police seized about 2,000 guns, arresting their owners. There were no figures on the exact number of arrests made, but the number attained in the first month ahead of the gun ban that year totaled 182.

Police conducting check points across the country from 12:01 a.m. Sunday to 12:01 a.m. yesterday netted 22 high-powered guns, 28 small weapons, three blanks/ air-soft guns and a grenade, Cano said.

Negligence no excuse

"This is zero negligence on their part because we have been conducting all kinds of information drive on the gun ban since January last year," Espina said.

Under the law, those found guilty of illegal possession of firearms during the election season face a penalty of one to six years imprisonment and disqualification from holding public office.

Espina said the PNP had been very vocal about its intention to strictly impose the gun ban from Jan. 10 to June 9 this year to ensure safe and peaceful elections in May.

1.1 million loose firearms

The PNP mapped out its maximum against delinquent gun owners in the hope that next year no less than 75 percent every month the number of loose firearms in the country.

Police estimate there are at least 1.1 million unlicensed guns around the country, with half of the number held by criminals and "threat groups."

The police, military and the Commission on Elections (Comelec) have put up 3,500 mobile checkpoints across the country to strictly implement the gun ban.

Cano said Calabarzon registered the most number of violations so far, with authorities arresting 14 people.

Nine cases were reported in Metro Manila, eight in Western Visayas, four in Cagayan Valley, three in the Ilocos Region, two each in the Southern and Caraga regions and one each in Eastern Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Western Mindanao and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

He did not say in his report where the two other violators were arrested.

Reminder to soldiers

In a message to his troops, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Victor Estrada said some members shall be held responsible for personnel under their command who shall disobey the military rule of nonpartisanship and professionalism.

Southern Tagalog

"We shall emphasize that [the soldiers' only political participation is his right to vote," Estrada said.

People suspected of violating the gun ban in the Southern Tagalog provinces of Laguna, Quezon and Batangas, according to local police correspondents, quoting the police.

In Batulao, Laguna, retired army man Romulo Clemente, 66, and retired scientist Avelino Bautista Barela, were arrested after allegedly shooting and wounding a certain Nonoy Reyes.

Witnesses saw the two suspects having an argument with Reyes before Barela purportedly shot him, according to Senior Supt. Reandrew Labrador, Lagu na police director.

In Sariaya, police flagged down a village patrol vehicle driven by Napoleon de Castro, who was found himself in possession of a gun in Sariaya.

De Castro was arrested after he went to a police station to ask about the apprehension of a passenger tricycle he owned. Policemen saw a gun in his waistband and De Castro admitted he had no permit to carry it, Angeles said.

Also in Cavite, two soldiers and a motorcycle were detained after police found them within 200 m of a precinct.

Meanwhile, at least eight people were arrested in Western Visayas. PCSO reports from Governor Gloria, Iloilo 2 Malabar Jr. and Marivali Bello Lumba, Iloilo 4 Southern Leyte, Nestor B. Bongco Jr. and Felipe T. Celiza, 1 Negros Occidental Rosendo

Arrests in Visayas

A soldier and two civilians were nabbed in Cagayan de Oro for violation of the gun ban.

Senior Supt. Josephus Angan, Cagayan police director, identified the suspects as Pfc. Daniel Ian Bernardo Quevedes and Edgar Bautista.

Bautista was arrested when he went to a police station to ask about the apprehension of a passenger tricycle he owned. Policemen saw a gun in his waistband and Bautista admitted he had no permit to carry it, Angan said.

Also in Cagayan, two civilians and a motorcycle were detained after police found them within 200 m of a precinct.

Meanwhile, at least eight people were arrested in Western Visayas. PCSO reports from Governor Gloria, Iloilo 2 Malabar Jr. and Marivali Bello Lumba, Iloilo 4 Southern Leyte, Nestor B. Bongco Jr. and Felipe T. Celiza, 1 Negros Occidental Rosendo Boquecosa

Optical Media Board seeks gun ban exemption from Comelec

By Jerome Aning

THE OPTICAL MEDIA BOARD (OMB) has asked the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to exempt its agents from the firearms ban.

In a letter to Comelec Chair Jose Melo, OMB Executive Director Anthony Linsangan said the OMB intelligence operatives needed their firearms so that they could pursue their investigations, raids and other activities in combat piracy and violations of intellectual property rights.

"Without the requested exemption, there would be a drastic reduction in the safety and security of enforcement personnel," Linsangan said.

He submitted the names of about 156 agents applying for exemption for firearms, mainly pistols, and a few revolvers, shotguns, and rifles. Some agents have more than one firearm. One has seven.

Linsangan and his agents needed to protect themselves in their operations, among others, against the illegal reproduction, manufacture, distribution and smuggling of counterfeit optical discs or materials.

Comelec Commissioner Lucenito Tagle, chair of the firearms ban committee, said he would look into the application.

Tagle said it was "already too late" to amend the Comelec resolution identifying the 33 agencies exempted from the gun ban.

Bishop notes 'ominous' signs for automated polls in May

From page A1

vote, and the crucial task of educating the voters seems to have fallen on the shoulders—and growing hips—of the late Bonfil Batoctoy.

An outspoken leader of the Catholic Church cited three observations as "ominous" signs that the country's first automated election in May may be headed for disaster.

"Why is it that to date, the machines intended to man the machines are still in the dark about their supposed task? How come it is a group called Smartmatic that is doing the supposed voting instruction?" Archbishop Emeritus Oscar Cruz wondered aloud in an interview yesterday.

The retired head of the Lingayen-Dagupan Diocese was apparently referring to the Comelec's outsourcing of the functioning the popular all-female troupe, which started sing late last year.

Titled "Bilog na Bilog Ito," the song and dance number produced by GMA Network has only twice the votes it has got recently (81 vs 40) in computerized balot in the May polls, by dividing the totals corresponding to the names of candidates.

"Where are the machines?" Cruz added. "How come these machines have been tested so far? Did not results as expected?"

His first batch of the premier count optical scan (PCOS) machines—the hardware approved by the Commission on Elections (Comelec)—started arriving in the country last month.

One big a dry run, some of the newly shipped machines reportedly failed to read even well-shaded ballots, requiring adjustments in their sensitivity level.

BISHOP Cruz: 'Sus Santo' among bad omens

Hacking

Cruz also doubted the PCOS machines would be secure enough against cheating. "Is it true that their data banks can be undone by other human hands to do exactly contrary else?" he said.

"And is it not true that governmen agencies have been hacked recently?" the prelate added.

He was referring to the attacks made by skill mischief-find hackers on the websites of the Department of Health, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, National Treasury Coordinating Council, and Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Cruz also asked what had become of the Comelec's plan to train up to 50,000 technicians who would serve as teachers/overseers and assist teachers on election day.

"All these are anything but comforting for the people and reassuring for the country," he told the lawyers. "Should this not already be a big bad omen of things to come?"

'Social disorder'

Cruz also noted what he called the deteriorating peace and order situation in Central Mindanao following the Nov. 23 election-related massacre in Maguindanao province.

He said private armies of local politicians, though now the target of a massive government crackdown, were "still around and unduly waiting for their marching orders."

"Mindanao is already in trouble, as blatantly initiated by the whole Maguindanao massacre. There are indications to the effect that the whole of Mindanao could become even more dangerous and problematic," Cruz insisted.

"Without some 10 percent of the whole electorate in the country running from Mindanao, would the national elections be postponed? Is there a social disorder in the making?" he asked.

PNP recalls 1,600 cops guarding 700 VIPs

From page A1

"The money generated from this new system will all go to the Comelec," Sarmiento said.

In past elections, she said those who had escorts were usually asked to apply for a Comelec exemption.

Bantaymoto's group provides protection to elected officials, bishop victims, witnesses of sensational crimes, businessmen and other persons under threat but is prohibited from dismantling any for for the service.

Agents assigned with the Presidential Security Group are exempted from this order, she said.

But individuals, even those occupying key government positions, who want to avail of police escorts must obtain the authorization of the Comelec.

Sarmiento also clarified that the PNP would not pull out policemen assigned to state witnesses and kidnap victims.

Since Sunday, the official said that all PNP personnel had been required to report to her office in Camp Crame daily "for accounting and in preparation for their redeployment."

Redeployment defended

Also yesterday, PNP Director General Jesus Versoza defended the redeployment of personnel and town police chiefs across the country, saying the move was part of its efforts to protect the PNP from "partisan politics."

Versoza downplayed allegations that the reassignment of senior police officers was influenced by politicians afflicted with the Aquino administration.

"A redeployment of police chiefs is actually a regular thing in the PNP as election near. This is meant to ensure that none of our men will be used for partisan politics," Versoza told the lawyers.

He added that the revamp was necessary to "inflate [with] blood and energy" in the government's fight against private armies being maintained by politicians.

According to Versoza, some officers affected by the reshuffle were actually promoted to a higher position and had completed their two-year tour of duty in their assignments.

The Liberal Party and local executives have criticized the reassignments of PNP officers in towns and provinces. The political party claimed the revamp was aimed at helping administration candidates win in the elections.

Journalists, lawyers seek live coverage of Ampatuan trial

From page A1

spokesperson Abdu Marquez had suggested that the entire Reyes office it was within her discretion to decide on such matters in her court.

BIR members said they would take up the matter with the board so that the legal group could formally endorse the 85-20% request.

The SCJP alerted claims made by some sectors regarding live coverage were subjecting witnesses to undue influence.

"I think that is a panacea to action," Paraan said. Given public interest in the case, she said that there was need to have transparency in the trial.

Albularia finds witnesses intimidated or suspicious and his sister interrupted a convoy that passed through Shariff Aguak town in Maguindanao on its way to file the candidacy for governor of his political rival, Buluan Vice Mayor Ismael Mangudadatu.

Pilay seven severely mutilated bodies were later unearthed from shallow graves about 2 kilometers from where the convoy was stopped. The victims included the wife and two sisters of Mangudadatu and 30 journalists.

Deterrent to injustice

"While the NUP recognizes the rights of the accused to a fair trial, we also believe that the court can exert efforts to protect his rights without violating the rights of the witnesses and prosecutors," Paraan said.

She added that the request addressed to Reyes would also ask that journalists covering the trial be allowed to use audio recorders so they could accurately report the proceedings.

BIP national secretary Tom Prado noted that live coverage must be allowed to ensure that suspension would be brought to justice.

Prado said media presence would serve as a "safeguard that justice runs at the pace we expect it to. It is painful to see but one of the few deterrents [to injustice] is media presence. These things must be open to the public, subject to the usual restrictions on the number of those wanting to control attendance, because it is part of the right to know."

LEGION OF HONOR: President Arroyo confers the Philippine Legion of Honor to Lt. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer of the Eastern Mindanao Command for leading the AFP troops that conducted search, seizure and arrests with utmost respect for human rights when the province of Maguindanao was placed under martial law. (See story on Page A1.)

Lawyer Harry Roque who represents the families of 14 of the 30 journalists killed, noted that the Supreme Court had ordered the Sandiganbayan to allow live coverage when plunder charges were read to former President Joseph Estrada based on a motion filed by De Ocampo Correspondents Association of the Philippines.

Good behavior

"Even the SC courts do not believe that live coverage results in a miscarriage of justice. Because it actually compels everyone to behave as their best," Roque said.

Rosario Librarian, BIP executive vice president, vowed to take up the NUP's request in its next board meeting.

Under the task force, the BIP heads all legal efforts to ask direct compensation for the victims together with volunteer lawyers, private prosecutors, Public Information Law Center, Free Legal Assistance Group, Union of People's Lawyers in Mindanao and the National Union of People's Lawyers.

Two women lawyers, Cornie Rose Capal and Cynthia Ogasendo, were among the victims in the Maguindanao massacre and privileged the BIP to get involved in the case.

Prado said this was the first time that all BIP offices and regional centers were being mobilized to bring a case to justice.

Librarian said the task force would also file administrative charges against all police, military, elected and appointive officials involved in the massacre.

She yesterday, Paraan appealed to all journalists covering Ampatuan's bail hearing on Jan. 15 to avoid black to maul, but "use grief, anger and the campaign for justice."

Alleged Ampatuan man in Smartmatic speaks up

By Mark B. Meadows
Inquirer Mindanao

COTABATO CITY—THE MAN named in Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. as a "political operator" of the once politically powerful Ampatuan clan of Maguindanao came out yesterday to clarify his relationship with the family and his role as a contractual worker of Smartmatic TIM, the company tapped to computerize the May 10 polls.

Rolando Campos (not Olympio as reported) said he had resigned as an employee of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) before he signed a contract as the provincial coordinator of Smartmatic.

This, he said, effectively cut his ties with the region's political leadership.

The Ampatuans, long-time administration allies, dominated the political leadership in the ARMM and Maguindanao. The ARMM governor was Zaldy Ampatuan. The governor of Maguindanao was his brother Saudamin Jr., while the vice governor was Sajid Islam Ampatuan.

The mayor of Datu Unsay town, Andal Ampatuan Jr., was hoping to succeed his father but is now in jail as the principal suspect in the brutal killing of 57 people identified with his political rival.

On Monday, Pimentel named Campos as one of the "political operators with known connections to the Ampatuans" who was hired by Smartmatic.

Campos said his functions under his contract with Smartmatic did not allow him access to the automated poll counting machines which, as some opposition leaders fear, could enable him to rig the results for a favored candidate.

Said Pimentel in a statement: "While there is materially nothing wrong with being identified with the Ampatuans, under the circumstances, Smartmatic should refrain from giving the impression that the dominant political clan in Maguindanao can sway the appointment of its personnel who have a heavy duty to perform in the automation (of) elections in the area."

Campos said his job was only to "establish" election reports on counting the ballots and to radio signals that the transmission of election results in May.

"In other words, my job belongs to a pre-implementation period of the poll automation" to ensure there are radio signals in place for the electronic transmission of results from all polling clusters.

"For overall clarity, I am not part of the technical team that conducts the ongoing radio signal survey," he said.

GMA cites martial law overseer

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE MILITARY COMMANDER who oversaw the week-long implementation of martial law in Maguindanao late last year was conferred the Philippine Legion of Honor Award by President Macapagal-Arroyo in formal rites in Malacañang yesterday.

Lt. Gen. Raymundo Penera, head of the Eastern Mindanao Command, was cited for his role as the "chief military implementor" of President Arroyo's Dec. 4, 2009, proclamation placing Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat province and Cotabato City under martial rule to investigate the massacre of 57 people in Maguindanao.

Martial law was imposed by the President supposedly to stop a brewing rebellion about to be mounted by armed followers of the Ampatuan political clan, erstwhile political overlords in Maguindanao and parts of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, some of whose members were suspected of being behind the massacre.

Penera, a native of Sorsogon, is head of the Philippine National Police directorate for integrated operations in Western Mindanao, was also conferred the Philippine Legion of Honor Award by the President.

Police and troopers led the 12 soldiers and 13 policemen who were either cited or promoted for their roles in implementing martial law.

PENERA

Those who received Outstanding Achievement Medals from the military were Col. Leo Perez, Lt. Col. Edgardo Orlan, Lt. Col. Rolando Hermosa and Lt. Col. Axel Polistra.

From the PNP those who received the medal were Director Raul Castañeda, Chief Supt. Sebastian Ebo Jr., Senior Supt. Raymundo Latag, Senior Supt. Sonny David, Senior Supt. Pedro Bustria Jr. and Supt. Pantilo Segovia.

At for the situation in Maguindanao, Penera said he would prefer that the province remained under the state of emergency until after the election because, as of now, there are still no permanent local officials in the province," Penera told reporters after the awarding.

He said it would be better if Maguindanao were placed under the control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

"We recommend that Maguindanao be placed under Comelec control so that it will be the Comelec that will declare so," he said.

Sultan Kudarat and Cotabato City likewise continue to be under a state of emergency which was imposed by President Arroyo before she declared martial law and which remains in effect even after martial law was lifted.

"We have recommended that we continue the state of emergency until after the election because, as of now, there are still no permanent local officials in the province," Penera told reporters after the awarding.

He said it would be better if Maguindanao were placed under the control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

"We recommend that Maguindanao be placed under Comelec control so that it will be the Comelec that will declare so," he said.

Fake AIDS test certificates result in Pinoys' deportation

By Jerome Aning

LABOR SECRETARY Marianito Roque yesterday ordered a crackdown on fake lines of AIDS test certificates which led to the deportation of 37 Filipino overseas workers.

Roque said one of the deported Ofws said their agency in the Philippines prepared and submitted all their travel documents, including their AIDS test certificates.

But she said that they did not really undergo AIDS tests because their agency told them the test would be done in Seoul.

"We strongly urge overseas to adhere to the stringent requirement and ensure that the documents and required certificates of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are in accordance with international standards," Roque said.

He said the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Seoul will refer the Ofws' passports in South Korea to shed light on the matter.

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ELECTION BRIEFING Elections Chair Jose Melo (standing) presides over Monday's meeting on the automated election with members of the executive department including (seated from left) Vice President Noli de Castro, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Comelec Commissioner Nicolasa Ferrer. Ermita says he and other Cabinet members are satisfied with the technology adopted by the Commission on Elections, but De Castro says he still finds Comelec's information drive "insufficient." RON MEDALLA

Pangasinan shotguns recalled

LINGAYEN, PANGASINAN— The Pangasinan police will recall the shotguns issued by the provincial government to more than 1,200 barangay captains in the province.

Provincial legal officer Geraldine Rasalpal said the shotguns, as provided for in an agreement between the barangay officials and the police, would be deposited at police stations in various areas during the election period.

But, Senior Supt. Proceso Barba, provincial police director, said there would be a problem on where to keep the guns as there were police stations without armories to keep them.

Some mayors asked the police not to recall the shotguns, but Barba said this was not allowed under the election gun ban.

In Bulacan, police have announced five people found carrying firearms in violation of the gun ban.

Senior Supt. Edgardo Tinio, Bulacan police director, said the guns included five pistols and a shotgun as confiscated in separate operations. Reports from Rolando Ilorde, *Inquirer Northern Luzon*, and Carmela Reyes-Estropia, *Inquirer Central Luzon*

Melo says GMA can't appoint new SC chief

From page A1

member Supreme Court who is not an opponent of Ms Arroyo's.

Sen. Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan yesterday urged Malacañang to leave it to the next President to appoint the next Chief Justice, saying that "an appointment of dubious legality will taint the image and reputation of the Supreme Court."

Pangilinan, a member of the Liberal Party like Defensor, said Ms Arroyo would be going against the constitutional ban on midnight appointments if she named Puno's replacement.

Pangilinan urged the Judicial and Bar Council (JBC) not to submit a short list of nominees to Malacañang.

JBC defers discussion

The JBC, which is tasked with screening candidates for the judiciary, yesterday decided to defer discussing the topic of Puno's successor.

Sen. Francis Escudero, the Senate representative to the JBC, said the council decided to defer discussion "on whether President Arroyo can still appoint the new Supreme Court Chief Justice during the last three months of her term."

Political considerations should not be taken into account, the JBC added, as it considers the issue of Puno's successor, Escudero said.

"Our decision should have nothing to do with President Arroyo or any other political considerations," Escudero said after attending a meeting of the JBC.

"My decision will be based on what is constitutional, legal and fair. I would like to believe that the other members of the JBC would also decide along those lines," he added.

Palace cries foul

Malacañang yesterday cried foul over insinuations that the President was bent on handpicking the next Chief Justice.

Gary Olivar, deputy presidential spokesperson, said Ms Arroyo would decide only in favor of "national interest" but depending on whether the JBC would submit a list of nominees to replace Puno.

He said it was in the national interest not to have such an important position vacated for such a long period of time.

Olivar was referring to the period from May 17—when Puno reaches his mandatory retirement age—to June 30 when the appointing power, Ms Arroyo, steps down from office.

The Palace spokesperson said the ball was in the hands of the JBC and ultimately the Supreme Court, in case a petition was filed questioning the legality of appointing a Chief Justice hardly before the President's term expires.

Olivar noted that some sectors were urging the JBC not to submit a list of nominees, apparently to keep Ms Arroyo from having to pick the next Chief Justice. He said such a move was "politically loaded and politically interested."

More time sought

At least three members of the JBC asked for more time to decide whether they should start the process of selecting the next Chief Justice soon or wait until the next administration, according to Quezon City Rep. Matias Defensor Jr.

Defensor, a JBC member, reckoned that since JBC nominees were inclined to support his position that the President should be allowed to appoint the next Chief Justice even during the prohibitive period.

Defensor appealed to his fellow JBC members to start the process of selecting the next Chief Justice and for the high court decide whether the President could appoint the next Chief Justice during the prohibitive period.

He said three members asked that the JBC decision on whether or open up the Chief Justice position for nominations be deferred.

The JBC has four regular members, two consultants, three ex-officio members, one ex-officio chair.

Defensor has urged the JBC to come up with a list of candidates to replace Puno.

He said that most of the JBC members felt that they could not wait for the next President to make the appointment because it would take another three months after Ms Arroyo steps down before the JBC members, especially the nominees from Congress, could be named.

Defensor said he expected the matter to be voted on in their next meeting on Monday.

No leadership vacuum

Jose Midas Marquez, the deputy Court spokesperson and deputy court administrator, dismissed the idea of a leadership vacuum in the high tribunal when Puno retired and his duties could no longer appoint a replacement because of a supposed constitutional prohibition.

"That's speculative," Marquez said.

He added that the JBC is still known to first tackle whether the appointments ban also applies to the post of Chief Justice.

"The position of Chief Justice is important. He's like the chief executive officer of the judiciary," Marquez said.

Under the Constitution (Article VIII, Section 4[1]), he said, he's also the chair of the presidential electoral tribunal," he added.

According to Marquez, there is another legal opinion that argues that the constitutional ban on appointments to members of the executive branch and not to magistrates of the judiciary.

He said the JBC would definitely come on the controversial legal perspectives next week.

Marquez said he expected to defer ... nominating for the successor of Chief Justice Puno because they wanted to find out the previous arrangements," Marquez said. BOM reports from Norman Bordadora and Christine F. Fajardo

Justice warns SC ruling on cities may cause havoc

From page A1

were compromised. It also compared the municipalities from which they originate there to have an income of P100 million per kpc or for city/land.

There are Cathaloguan and Barangay in Eastern Samar; Bayboy in Leyte; Bago, Cotcot and Naga in Cebu; Cabadbaran in Negros Oriental; Mati in Davao Oriental; Cabadbaran in Agusan del Norte; Bayugan in Agusan del Sur; Tandag in Surigao del Sur; Lianga in Surigao; Tagbilaran in Quezon; Tabuk in Kalinga; Basic in Ilocos Sur; and El Salvador in Misamis Oriental.

Carpio said the Supreme Court's "unprecedented ruling would remove not concentrate political issues long ago settled, such as the Pirma initiative in Santiago and the people's initiative in Lambian."

Carpio's dissenting view was shared by Associate Justices Conchita Carpio Morales, Antonio Brion and Bienvido Reyes.

Pirma case

In 1997, the Supreme Court ruled as unconstitutional the petition launched by the People's Initiative for Reform Modernization and Action (Pirma) to revise the Charter. The vote on the original petition was 8-7.

The reformist denied Pirma's motion for reconsideration early a tied 7-7 vote.

"Countless other decisions of this court would come back to haunt it, long after such decisions have become final and executory following the in-votes on the motions for reconsideration which resulted in the denial of the motions," Carpio said.

"Such a ruling would forthwith [sic] not only this court, but also the executive and legislative branches of the government," he added.

Rounds of litigation

Carpio said business transactions made as a result of final decisions of the Supreme Court "would also attract for another round of litigation, dragging along innocent third parties who had relied on such prior final decisions of this court."

"This court cannot afford to unleash such a catastrophe on the nation," he said.

The League of Cities of the Philippines filed its own motion for reconsideration on Jan. 5 to appeal the Supreme Court decision that nullified the 16 laws included in the 2007 conversion charter of the Constitution.

CARPIO

Once their cityhood laws are ratified by their citizens, the ensuing municipalities would cut into the internal revenue allotment shares of cities that meet the income requirement without causing up with the same income as the existing cities, it said.

Equal protection clause

The Supreme Court, in its decision upholding the cityhood laws, based no violation of the equal protection clause.

The ferries, it said, were already applying for cityhood in Congress when the Local Government Code required only a P20-million income for towns to qualify for cityhood.

Ferries, such as the impeachment of Joseph Estrada in 2000, however, resulted in the proposed laws being bypassed to the 13th Congress.

The Supreme Court also ruled that the 8-6 deadlock that denied the motion for reconsideration "is tantamount to a denial of the motion by 8 votes to 6 votes which is sufficient to meet the issue of whether or not the underlying decision of Nov. 18, 2008, had indeed passed upon the issues raised in the motion for reconsideration of the said decision."

The court pronounced that the decision "is tantamount to a denial of the motion by 8 votes to 6 votes which is sufficient to meet the issue of whether or not the underlying decision of Nov. 18, 2008, had indeed passed upon the issues raised in the motion for reconsideration of the said decision."

The court pronounced that the decision "is tantamount to a denial of the motion by 8 votes to 6 votes which is sufficient to meet the issue of whether or not the underlying decision of Nov. 18, 2008, had indeed passed upon the issues raised in the motion for reconsideration of the said decision."

"Accordingly, the motions of the respondent LGUs, in light of the 6-8 vote, should be deliberated anew until the required concurrence on the issue of the validity or invalidity of the laws in question is, on the merits, secured," it added.

Bush raring to see Pacman fight at new Dallas arena

From page A1

him. "Everybody just wants to see Pacquiao anyway."

Jones and Cowboys owner Jerry Jones commissioned the deal a day after Arena announced the Cowboys' $95 playoff victory over Philadelphia as the billion-dollar state-of-the-art stadium.

Arena watched the playoff game just two weeks from Bush, he said. Bush's reaction was the same reaction he'd heard repeatedly since negotiations with Mayweather bogged down over the American boxer's insistence on stringent drug testing and Pacquiao's reluctance to oppose.

Mayweather originally insisted the tests be conducted right up to the fight, while Pacquiao wanted a 30-day cut off before the bout.

The sides went into media

BIG PACMAN MAN For now US President George W. Bush suggests Floyd Mayweather will not be Manny Pacquiao's opponent but says it doesn't matter because "everybody just wants to see Pacquiao anyway." AFP

isn't a more appropriate place in the world for him to fight," Arena said.

Jones said ESPN.com he was thrilled to host a bout involving a fighter of Pacquiao's stature, regardless of his opponent, and even if the fight with Clottey wasn't for the mega money opponent that Pacquiao-Mayweather promised to be.

"I never got into the NFL or bought the Cowboys for the money," Jones told ESPN.com. "I was lucky enough to already have some.

"This is about having a fight, or like Manny and an event like this in our venue. When we [decided the deal, I was shaking as much as I was when we won the Eagles. I'm just so excited."

Arena was in Texas to wrap up details for the pay-per-view fight, which will be the first boxing match in the stadium.

18,000 seats

Top Rank spokesperson Lee Samuels said the arena would be configured to seat 50,000 fans for the fight, but that capacity could be raised or lowered.

"This stadium has blown me away," Arena told The Associated Press. "It is the most magnificent facility I've ever seen."

Jones reportedly offered a $25-million site fee for the Pacquiao-Hatton fight. Though Arena is a longtime New York Giants season ticket holder, he found common ground with Jones he another major event in the opulent new stadium.

"This is a competitive fight, as competitive as the Cotto fight going in," Arena said. "We get a tremendous deal at the site. It's a big event, and I think we'll do unbelievable."

Still hoping

Although Mayweather's representatives still were holding out hope the Pacquiao fight could be salvaged, Mayweather also is expected to open bid.

He noted that the JBC be allowed to first tackle whether the appointments ban also applies to the post of Chief Justice.

"The position of Chief Justice is important. He's like the chief executive officer of the judiciary," Marquez said.

Under the Constitution (Article VIII, Section 4[1]), he said, he's also the chair of the presidential electoral tribunal," he added.

According to Marquez, there is another legal opinion that argues that the constitutional ban on appointments to members of the executive branch and not to magistrates of the judiciary.

He said the JBC would definitely come on the controversial legal perspectives next week.

Marquez said he expected to defer ... nominating for the successor of Chief Justice Puno because they wanted to find out the previous arrangements," Marquez said. BOM reports from Norman Bordadora and Christine F. Fajardo

Fajardo

Fajardo

Fajardo

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

Jitters

LAST WEEK, THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS, despite automation jitters and other problems, gave itself a score of 8 on a scale of 10 in terms of its readiness to undertake the country's first automated elections in May. But is the Comelec really that well prepared for the automated elections? Will it give specifics, such as facts and figures, on the state of its preparedness?

EDITORIAL Politicians, candidates as well as the man in the street cannot be faulted if they express pessimism about the outlook for the country's first automated elections. The Comelec does not have a record that inspires optimism. This, plus the widespread speculation that the administration will create a situation that will make it possible for President Macapagal-Arroyo, one of the most distrusted presidents the country has ever had, to continue in power after June 30, 2010 as "holdover" president, is enough to give the action the jitters.

The reports last week were not encouraging:

• On Jan. 6, Comelec Chair Jose Melo disclosed some problems in the "physical preparations," such as the delivery of ballot boxes, the condition of the ballots, the final list of candidates needed for the printing of the ballots and the substitution of candidates on election day itself.

• On Jan. 6, Commissioner Gregorio Larrazabal said that of the 680 simple ballots inserted in the precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines being tested at the Smartmatic warehouse in Cabuyao, Laguna, only 38 were properly read. That is a 5 percent "passing mark," and is certainly not acceptable. What if a similar thing occurs in the actual operations of the PCOS machines in various parts of the country?

Larrazabal sought to allay fears about the PCOS performance, attributing the failure to a "high shading threshold" that, he said, could be easily corrected.

• Retired Chief Justice Artemio V. Panganiban noted in his column in the Inquirer that because there are 1,630 towns in the country, at least 1,630 types of ballots have to be printed and 1,630 different kinds of voting machines have to be delivered before election day on May 10. Will the Comelec be able to find a solution to this "logistical nightmare" before election day?

• Cesar Flores, Smartmatic president for Asia-Pacific, said last Saturday that this week is a critical period for automating the May elections because they have to sign the contract to produce the ballot boxes and get the list of candidates and polling precincts. If the contract is not signed this week, he said, Smartmatic would have a problem in the production of the ballot boxes.

Flores also said the Comelec had to give Smartmatic the list of candidates and polling precincts this week so that they could plan how the software of the PCOS machines would be configured. He said that if Smartmatic does not receive the needed data, it cannot finalize the software, production will be delayed, and Smartmatic might have to increase the contract price to speed up production of the ballot boxes.

• Smartmatic also complained that it was having problems in its site surveys in Maguindanao because of the state of emergency in the province, but deputy presidential spokesperson Gary Olivar said it sounded like an excuse for "underperformance."

Understandably, the kinks in the planned automated elections in May are surfacing only now because this is the first time that such an election will be held in this country. But a comprehensive assessment of the problems must be made immediately so that solutions can be worked out and immediately applied. It might help if a dry run in key polling places could be conducted so that the problems can be identified.

Last year, some people proposed that the Comelec should also prepare for the old, manual type of elections as a fallback in case there is widespread failure of automated elections. It might be time to revisit this plan, and adopt some failsafe measures to ensure that the May polls will not fail. A total failure of the automated elections is too horrible to imagine. It could result in nationwide confusion, chaos and violence.

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U-turn price tag

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

"EATING WORDS NEVER GAVE ME INDIGESTION," Winston Churchill would joke.

Will our Supreme Court also eat Cha-Cha-Churchill? The tribunal unanimously voted a "final" decision on 16 issues seeking to manipulate an entire Lumenos to finches, horse to horse Norte and Negs to Cebu, plus 12 other would-be-cities. Robbed Republic Act 9009 standards, like gravitating 19,000 bloblets to annual income.

The Court humiliated itself by ruling: "The Constitution is clear," Justice Antonio Carpio wrote. "Creation of local government units must follow criteria set." Apple tree ears not wiggle through "manipulation not authorized by law."

The Court also spiked reconsideration pleas by the "League of 16." "No further pleadings shall be entertained," it said. The decision had become "final and executory."

Check your dictionary. "Final" means "definitive, unchangeable, not to be altered or amended in relation to a court action." That's the opposite of "changeable," "incomplete" or "in contestation."

Finders like unending of "final" decisions would guarantee chaos. Thus, courts shy away from reversing decisions: "We are not final because we are infallible," US Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson wrote. "We are infallible only because we are final."

"When is a Supreme Court decision final?" asked the layman's Cubo-Hubris. "Apparently not even when they say so." Ooh-la-la Filipino?

The Court, last week, flipped-flopped. It retained a "final" decision that's attached 16 cities back into towns. Its finish—as was it fourth?—thought, the 16 towns are cities, the Court ruled, "[Cebu] must be like the [Court] ruling in every true sense," Hubris noted.

Congressmen turned 27 towns via Executive-Legislative (ELA) pacts into cities. The Court's unanimous ruling: Congress "has no power to convert municipalities into cities. Why?

On average, a city gets P200 million in Internal Revenue allotments. In contrast, a town receives P40 million in such grants. The IRA just came up as P214.7 billion last year.

IRA is not "begging bowls" for 2010, Lito Banayo, Arroyo spokesman, reminded us. Nor is it "an entitlement." It's a share of the Bureau of Internal Revenue collections. Not did they beef up local revenue efforts. Instead, Tanjung to Tungkil, Boys to Zeus and Baybay in Leyte, among others, opted for jackpot: a cushy short cut, via exemption, through presidential legislation.

The Court refused to deploy along: "The Constitution is clear," Justice Antonio Carpio wrote. "Creation of local government units must follow criteria set." Apples into ears not wiggle through "manipulation not authorized by law."

The Court also spiked reconsideration pleas by the "Leagues

To appoint or not to appoint

A NEW CONTROVERSY HAS CROPPED AND IT revolves around the retirement of Chief Justice Reynato Puno on May 17, one and a half months before President Macapagal-Arroyo ends her term on June 30. Last Dec. 21, Quezon City Rep. Dan Defensor wrote his colleagues in the Judicial and Bar Council, urging them to come up with recommendations for Puno's replacement as that there will be no vacancy in that post. Not as former Senate President Franklin Drilon pointed out in a recent article, two constitutional provisions have a bearing on it. Art. VIII, Sec. 4 (1) provides that any vacancy in the highest court shall be filled within 90 days of its occurrence. The JBC is required to prepare a minimum of three nominees in the Presidents within this period. On the other hand, Art. VII, Sec. 15 provides that during the two months immediately before the next presidential election and up to the end of a president's term, he or she shall not make appointments, except temporary ones to executive positions when continued vacancies will prejudice or endanger public safety. This provision seeks to prevent so-called "midnight appointments" by an outgoing president.

* * *

These two provisions are clearly in conflict with each other (another reason for the impression raised to revise the Constitution). Congressional lawyers admit the issue of presidential appointments is "controversial" and can even constitute a "grey area," though some opine that Art. VIII should carry more weight as it refers specifically to the judiciary, whereas the ban on appointments applies to both the executive and judicial branches. Should the Judicial and Bar decline to endorse to the constitutional ban, not appoint Puno's successor, there would be a dangerous "hiatus" in the Court, which should not be left "headless." Therefore, it is argued, GMA should fill the vacancy.

Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello was quoted yesterday as saying the President considered an "acting CJ." but lawyers would probably question if there's such a thing in the Judiciary. Bello said he is also appointing power. Others point out that there have been instances in the past

POLITICAL TIDBITS
Bel Rivera
Oliveros-Cusumano

when the chief justice was out of the country or fell ill and another magistrate took over as acting chief justice, so GMA should just let the high magistrate choose an acting chief. But those past cases did not involve a real vacancy, which is the case with Puno's retirement.

* * *

This issue, however, goes beyond the constitutional provisions. It has become highly politicized because the two most senior associate justices and constitutional experts are perceived to be on opposite sides of the political fence in a highly politicized Court. The most senior associate justice is Antonio Carpio, who used to be connected with the powerful Jaime Cojuangco family and served as "the Enrile," Puno's confidant in the early part of this administration, it had a falling out with GMA and its senior partners, all UP Diploma Rizalists, are now behind the candidacy of Secretary Aquino, together with their boy Ted Failon. Carpio, who turned 67 last October, has the reputation of being relatively anti-GMA, hence the prospect of appointing him may seem anathema to the Palace. Next in seniority is Associate Justice Corona, who reports directly to Malacañang because he used to be chief of staff when the current vice president, Corona, an Ateneo law graduate, has now nine years more to the SC. So, either of these would confirm the next administration as "2. The JBC's third nominee could be Perlas Bermudez, another UP Sigma Rhoan.

Rhetoric has to take that the succession issue is merely an extension of the old rivalry between the UP and the Ateneo law colleges, but Court insiders do not publicly deny that the magistrates might find themselves divided. There are those who argue that GMA should just leave it to her successor

AT LARGE
Rina Jimenez-David

When they tote up the bodies and lives lost and destroyed, will our honorable election commissioners arone for their sin of negligence and neglect?

to appoint Puno's successor, there would be a danger that "hiatus" in the Court, which should not be left "headless." Therefore, it is argued, GMA should fill the vacancy.

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Neophyte

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A CONGRESSMAN? FRIENDS, relatives and even new acquaintances have been asking me this question for the past seven months. I tell them that my carefree activities, like jaywalking or buying pirated materials have been restricted.

I am somewhat hesitant to answer this question partly because I feel that I still do not have enough experience as a congressman.

YOUNG BLOOD
Manny Pedatinos

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twenty-something set! Send below—Ed.

It took several months before House employees were able to recognize me as a lawmaker. There are still times when security guards prevent me from entering the main building of the Batasan, especially when I am not wearing a barong. In some committee hearings, I have to convince the chair that I am allowed to speak (because I am a congressman).

Perhaps because of my age, many of my colleagues, who are old enough to be my parents and even grandparents, presume that I am willing to be lectured about the intricacies of Philippine politics. In most cases, they are right. I am always interested to hear the unconventional and sometimes eccentric views of my veteran politician colleagues on issues like parochialism, nepotism, Charter change and the Hacienda Luisita saga.

But when I want to disagree with their opinions, I am torn between expressing my thoughts and acknowledging the wisdom of wisdom (not their rough interests) as my dissent as a relatively inexperienced congressman.

During informal chats, I often find myself unable to get my senior colleagues interested in topics that are popular among the youth. I cannot joke about subscribing them since many do not have Facebook accounts. I often have to clarify the difference between blogging, blogging and microblogging. Some wouldn't appreciate my humor. Before I derive satisfaction by uploading clever memes on the Internet through Twitter, I'd be fun, they also seem perplexed that I am an expert at googling but an ignoramus at golfing.

When it becomes evident that I cannot grab their attention by talking about Wii, iPads, or memelike, I yield by genuinely trying to be attuned to their interests. And so every day, I interrogate my constituents about their concerns, debates and the many positive virtues of the incumbent President.

Being a politician-blogger is sometimes embarrassing. I find it awkward to talk to members of Congress after learning their dark secrets and alleged involvement in various scandals through YouTube videos, and Blog. Once, I accidentally opened an outflattering web image of a lawmaker with a popular surname while inside the plenary.

Veteran members of the House of Representatives keep telling me it is the best place to retire. Another colleague described our job as the best in the world. Maybe they were referring to the fact that inactive House members continue receiving their monthly salaries even if they are guilty of losing a lawmaker even if he is spending time in prison or traveling on an extended vacation abroad. We are obliged to report for work from Mondays to Wednesdays only. Those who do not want to attend committee hearings in the mornings can go directly to the plenary hall at 4 p.m. We adjourn around 8 p.m.

Many of my colleagues have a chronic medical problem of absenteeism in the House. Others have decried the rising cost of legislation resulting from the inability of the House to muster a quorum. I have a personal complaint: I already memorized the names of all members of the 14th Congress, but I haven't seen all of them yet. I always bring a copy of the House directory to familiarize myself with the faces and pictures of my colleagues, but I still have to meet all of them in person because some photoshopped faces do not match reality. I am hoping that some of my inattentive colleagues will finally appear and attend the remaining sessions before the start of the election campaign period.

House members are often criticized as being anti-Internet. This does not apply to all House members. We have many reasonable and intelligent legislators. They can be attentive, witty and funny if they want to be so. There are several lawmakers who have never been absent from the plenary proceedings since 1987. There are many who resist personal attacks and arguments. They can be very articulate and progressive to cite when defending or rejecting a bill and they can effectively argue their position without bullying their opponents. They don't subscribe over media attention.

But my admiration for these brilliant members of the House ceases the moment they transform into rubber-stamp agents of the administration. Those who showed brilliance and superiority in their committees become blind followers of Malacañang's marching orders in the plenary. It is disappointing to watch independent thinkers losing the party line just to secure much-needed but worsened administration support in the coming elections.

From the start, I wanted to be described as an activist lawmaker. I am a member of two parliaments: the parliament of the streets and the parliament located near Batasan. I advocate change through meaningful and progressive legislation. I believe that activism is needed to spur fundamental change in society.

Unfortunately, my activist background does not prevent some people from treating me like a traditional politician. My office is swamped with solicitation letters from students who do not expect a rejection letter. I receive bundles of relief tickets which are considered useful by the organizers. There are people who want to judge my performance as a legislator by counting the number of land and soft projects of my office. I do not believe that my constituents will reward me for basic practice and culture in the country. But I detest the thinking of some people that youthful legislators have no experience to follow established political traditions.

I did not lose my license to be an idealist when I took my oath as a member of Congress. I did not—and will not—abandon my principles just to adhere to a particular. In fact, embracing the principles of activism can compromise my role as a young legislator. I must remain an activist if I want to escape the curse of politicians who fight the system in their youth but end up defending it in their later years.

Through my work in Congress, I have the opportunity to pursue the concerns of activists in pushing a workable agenda of change. The passage of the reproductive health bill—a priority legislation under a conservative institution inspires me every time I feel cynical about my job. Trips (those) with landlords, warlords, and other "lords" in Congress, but I can disregard the work hazard since I am more interested in seeing the number of people outside the gates of the Batasan pulling bigger and stronger. I recognize that my battles, like all activists can devote a lifetime in the noble struggle for lasting freedom, peace and justice.

Manny Pedatinos, 28, is a blogger and activist representing the Bahaghari Party-List in the House of Representatives.

'Zero tolerance'

THE COMELEC GUN BAN HAS JUST TAKEN EFfect but already, according to a news report, the poll body has approved 30 applications for exemptions while another 138 are pending "for approval."

While so many exemptions being granted, the gun ban might as well be lifted entirely, while the Comelec should declare the Philippines an "open country" for election-related killings and violence. Not all "incidents" may result in deaths of depravity and horror as the Maguindanao massacre, but already other unidentified killings have appeared on the national scene. What is the Comelec waiting for, another mass killing before it yet bans its various points on exemption?

The gun ban was instituted precisely to avoid election violence, such as what took place in the hands of supporters of candidates (also known as armed goons) are almost sure to be used for purpose of intimidation, if not outright suppression and elimination of rivals. The gun ban is supposed to even the playing field, with only police and military personnel—in uniform and on duty —authorized to carry firearms to keep the peace and prevent unpleasant confrontations.

But if, despite the fact the ban was instituted, the Comelec already gave permission to 26 private groups to bear arms, with over a hundred others waiting for their exemptions, then what's the use of having a gun ban at all? If one candidate is allowed to have armed bodyguards, then the rival party don't you think would be impelled to arm his local followers as well, and apply for exemption. In such a situation, the Comelec has ends up escalating, and not reducing, election-related violence.

* * *

SOME months back, I had written in this space about an appeal from the Napoleon Party for Comelec officials to adopt a "zero tolerance" policy regarding exemptions to the gun ban. With such a policy in place, there would no longer be any possibility for armed groups or

private armies to roam around, intimidating voters and electoral opponents alike.

I wonder if the Comelec board of commissioners had even considered such a proposal, or if instead they decided to "go with the flow" and proceed with the usual order of business. That is, to issue a pro forma gun ban and then turn around and grant exemptions to almost as a matter of course, regardless of the merits (if any) of the applicants.

If all the pending applications are granted, we can imagine just how armed-to-the-teeth this year's elections will be. As it is, as we saw in previous elections, even when they were not granted exemptions, candidates' camps still were said to be moving about to hire-by-armed contingents. But if exemptions are granted willy-nilly then armed groups could move around with greater impunity and sense of arrogance.

And in fact the Comelec should not only be complicit in the spread of violence, it should be largely responsible for the state of affairs. When they take up the bodies and lives lost and destroyed, will our honorable election commissioners arone for their sin of negligence and neglect?

* * *

ON TOP of this, the Comelec should not only take the rose-tinted view of "less, meaning all the applications, complete, and then reviewing and cancelling if possible the exemptions already granted.

As part of its "minimum," the Comelec should also publicize the names of the candidates who are actually applying for or already granted exemptions to the gun ban, the locales where they are running, and their party affiliations, if only to warn voters there about the candidate's predilection for violence and need for armed protection. Moreover, people should be given their reasons for applying for exemptions, while the Comelec should have the reasoning used in granting the applications.

Randy Padilla of Napoleon argues that if a candidate is truly running for office it is simply not fair or too much to ask that he or she would need armed security, then perhaps elective office is not only for him or her. Better to find safe and secure then risky one's lives of violence on the name of democracy.

After all, if no one is allowed to carry firearms during the campaign and election period, then wouldn't it be logical to assume that there is no risk or need for violence or violence?

The gun ban is a good thing, Exemptions, however, render it moot and worthless and a joke.

Bias in surveys, etc.

YESTERDAY'S EDITORIAL PRAISE BY CURIOUS is "Yes Jose, the history of the Court of Appeals [Tony Blanco] Defensor's conversion than the office of Chief Justice had never been vacant, we ever be a day" good thing the Supreme Court itself tions one of the better government websites.

On to public poll spotlight, we can find a list of the country's don't justices, going all the way back to Cayetano Arellano. There are a few mistakes on the list that even a non-lawyer can spot and which can easily be remedied, such as Manuel Bernabe's term as chief justice (May 20, 1951 to June 1986) or the order of Roberto Concepcion's successors (Querube Makalintal came before Fred Ruiz Castro). But in it, no, Defensor can find the perfect scapegoat to his arguments.

The closest we have to the acting chief justice? Look up Claudio Teehankee, the first Filipino who has served, for almost a month, as acting chief before being named the first chief justice after Edsa.

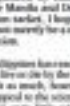
The office of chief justice has never been vacant? The very first succession, when Victorino Mapa replaced Arellano in April 1920, was marked by a vacancy that lasted a couple of months. Puruno there were more such vacancies. Cesar Bengzon's retirement (May 1966) was one of almost three two months had passed, and almost five months passed before Makalintal formally replaced Concepcion.

To be sure, the transition after Edsa have been seamless, with the successor taking office either on the same day or the day after the chief justice's retirement. There is, however, one exception: A couple of days passed before Andres Narciso was appointed Marcelo Fernan, who had resigned to run for senator in 1992. (Unfortunately, the interregnum from Cuba was running against Joseph Estrada.)

* * *

Last week's column, in which I criticized the SEED-CERE survey results for performance in the "Hao ang Pinoy" mass video, generated a tremendous text messages and a brief tale-shower of e-mails and online posts (starting with Maria Ressa's chats act of a response). I spent

NEWSSTAND
John Nery



half of Sunday responding to the messages.

A couple of messages (and from some of my friends in the ABS-CBN newsroom, just to be clear) I found instructive—in the sense that they illustrate what can go wrong when expressing opinions: a tone of condescension, a failure to understand the assumptions of quantitative writing, an inability to closely read what is being criticized.

Since everything is material, I've decided to arrange these comments in a workshop on opinion writing. (The Inquirer, organized by regional journalists from Ateneo de Manila and De La Salle University. The opinion market. I hope to make clear is not and reason merely be a matter of expressing one's opinion.

* * *

Electoral politics in the Philippines has reached the point where candidates live or die by the survey. No candidate will admit as much, however, because there is almost no appeal to the scientific polls issued survey. There is easy little weight room.

The responses of Brando Macedo, the ex-senator and ex-ambassador who now runs Joseph Estrada's second presidential campaign, and of presidential adviser Ronaldo Puno, the chief of administration candidate Gilbert Teodoro, to the latest surveys making the rounds demonstrate the limited range of options a politician has for dealing with survey results.

Giving bias. When Macedo heard about the Manny Villar-commissioned survey he dismissed it outright—because it was commissioned by Villar. That is a disservice, and only to Social Weather Stations, but to Manolito (see candidate), who has clearly gotten used to the idea that even PCPO surveys to prove whatever needs proving. But he never lost the support of his constituency even during his presidential trial, that he continues to enjoy the trust of the people.

This is what recent polling organizations like SWS and Pulse Asia commissioned surveys that were conducted on their own accounts and surveys that were commissioned by private parties. In other words, the robust reputation SWS and Pulse Asia have built over the years can get instantly contaminated surveys too, their work here cannot be divorced from their other work. Indeed, I understand that SWS requires private parties to share the commissioned surveys results with the public, which is a commendable policy.

Rodolfo Viñero Policy concedes that anti-administration sentiment has affected Teodoro's survey ratings. But if Teodoro breaches the 15-percent mark, "upon we say looking [some] numbers," he said "we have 15 percent supporting [who] are 25 percent that will be delivered by the machinery. I am sure the next president will be Gilbert Teodoro. The most important survey would be the one in February."

This is the kind of confident rebuttal in the draft. As I have written before, I think Teodoro's ceiling will be around 15 percent—the share of the vote Jose de Venecia received in 1998. The solid machinery supporters Bishop refers to the same De Venecia received. But Bishop's PPCI offered. It didn't work then; it won't work now.

Frustration, complete with false bravado, Macedo again: "Time na para i-bombahin ang Malacañang. Ibo, dispatchahin ang tanan against Teodoro. Ito ang sagot sa mga survey [sa] iba survey yan lang]. Ito ang happy where we are right now."

Is that a bet? A steady decline, plus a one-percentage point loss over Christmas? Is this the 24 percent that Teodoro's campaign needs? It's good to be confident, but it's also good to be realistic. It's good to be confident, but it's also good to be realistic. It's good to be confident, but it's also good to be realistic.

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'Deep, early cuts' needed

LETTERS

YOUR EDITORIAL, "WHAT'S AT STAKE," LAST Dec. 23 captured the blanket role of the Philippine delegation on the front lines of the 15th Conference of Parties (COP-15), the arena of 192 nations in Copenhagen that sought an ambitious global agreement to save humanity from climate change two years before the Kyoto Protocol's commitment in 2012.

As early as COP-13 in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2008, President Macapagal-Arroyo (who chaired the Philippine delegation, led by Secretary Heherson Alvarez, to call for "deep and early cuts" of emission by Annex-2 or industrialized countries of at least 30 percent from 1990 levels to moderate the destructive impacts of typhoons, drought and floods hitting vulnerable developing countries.

Beginning with the Carbon Trading Congress in Manufacturing Palace in November 2008, followed by the Earthen Living Conference hosted by the Philippine Senate in April 2009, and every week, the President and Alvarez campaigned to the countryside to call for commitments to join the coalition.

At the climate change negotiations in Bonn, Alvarez continued to lead the Philippine delegation to negotiate the Presidential call's goals, which gained momentum from Bonn to Copenhagen.

Slowly, several nations crossed the threshold for deep cuts: Norway at 40 percent; Switzerland at 45 percent; Brazil at 36-39 percent; Indonesia at 47 percent; South Korea at 30 percent; even, Japan at 8 to 25 percent.

In preparation for COP-15, members of the delegation were trained with the support and participation of NGOs, and in liaison with the Ateneo School of Government. This composite team of government officials and NGOs were marching shoulder to shoulder with the weight to advance the global and national interest.

In Copenhagen, the President faced the devastation 'six and a half hours' by Tuesday" and "hoping" and maintained case for adaptation funds for vulnerable island countries. The delegation played a key role in facilitating negotiations on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) where we are calling for the conservation and the enhancement of existing forests covering over 20 percent of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The resulting "Copenhagen Accord," which adheres to the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol and the 1994 Framework Convention on Climate Change, focuses on financing and environment fall far deep cuts in global emissions, to say, "We agree that deep cuts in global emissions are required ... with a view to reduce global emissions so as to hold the increase in global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius."

What is the apex of our campaign at COP-15, our call for deep and early cuts now, reinforced by the Copenhagen Accord.

The world has two years before the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012, but before that happens, the Philippine delegation seeks a legally binding commitment until COP-16 in Mexico in December 2010.

—EDGAR E. EBDEL,
Earth Savers Movement;
ANTONIO J. NIÑO, dean,
Ateneo School of Government;
NORA HENDRIX, Worker Unit;
LOUIE Philbert members

Media should protect gullible voters from pols

FILIPINOS SHOULD BE MORE DISCERNING in choosing their future leaders in the hotly-coming national elections.

Supposed media, especially in the provinces, are oftentimes taken for a ride by insulting political clans and political leaders when elections near nears.

With the gullibility of some voters, they fall prey to the whims and caprices of politicians in their respective provinces. On several occasions, these influential politicians force their son relatives to run against their leading relative or political party in the positions they are contesting.

On a factional scale, political, economic and social issues are relegated to the background, to the detriment of the country.

Media, to this context, should not instead and instead educate, enlighten and remind the voters that the fate of our country is at stake in this important political exercise.

—PEDRO MENDOZA JR.,
4727 Taylo St., Makati City

Paging Quezon City Hall: Danger on Ninth Avenue

NINTH AVENUE IN BAHAYANG SOCORRO, Quezon City, is one of the most difficult streets to navigate for pedestrians like us. Many vehicles (SUVs, buses, trucks, tricycles, motorbikes, etc.) drive very fast, particularly motorbikes, since they are easily pass between bigger motorists. One can easily be hit by them since few barber systems their lanes.

Another problem is that some residents/business like Tony Enrico Construction Manufacture of Oyster Mushrooms use the sidewalk for parking, forcing pedestrians to walk on the street.

People like us who rely mostly on our feet to go places feel unsafe and unprotected. We feel we are not getting the services and protection we expect from the government.

Public officials should visit the intersection of Tandang and Ninth Avenue (as well as F. Tuason and Lida Avenue) because, according to residents, Quezon City has the biggest number of traffic accidents, which means that it also has the highest number of reckless and careless drivers.

—JUAN C. DAPID,
judd888@gmail.com

Elaborate, scandalous parties should be probed

REFERRED TO THE LIFESTYLE SECTION OF the business issue of Dec. 22, 2009 is an article by Larry Lovino titled "Diamonds, mansions and fairy wings," which reported on the celebration of the 75th birth anniversary of a high society matriarch. Reading the article, garnished with unnecessary details of the extravagance of the guests, almost made me puke as it highlights the insensitive, scandalous, frivolous display of wealth and affluence by them amidst a nation "POOR" during these difficult times. I found burning curiosity on the matters really on, via my letter to the editor which was published in the business issue of Nov. 27, 2009 under the heading "Society page plays up extravagance amid budget."

Lovino (who admits being one of the guests) put a no wonder when he described the venue of the birthday bash (SRC Tent) as having been transformed into a "carnival fairyland," a "virtual fairyland" with the "tent ceiling covered with artificial snow dripping with sparkling jewelry" that "framed the crystal chandeliers from the diplomatic corps, high society matriarchs of industry and political hopefuls," while the "tables were covered in white linen and white, white, white and as lipstick and smoothie as big as mahjong tiles matched the decor with positive energy of the guests dancers as they clustered each other's hairpins inspired costume gowns" with the tiniest table hopping "like giggling birdies" and "fairy wings" to boot.

Lovino goes on to narrate that "the festive guests never relented into a long fashion run, way up in the garden and on to the tent with

its "jaw-dropping spectacle" and welcomed to a "fairy of Fairyland" clad "in an aquamarine jumpsuit dripping with pearls and giant fairy wings."

Lovino further notes that "the show [of the venue] was complete as white draped silk, the effect was like entering an enchanted forest with life-sized archangels descending on the dance-ables" bounded by "a plexiglass dance floor (that) lit up like magic." Then, he concludes with his own assessment of the affair as "the ball to beat, the finest gala to end this year of living dangerously."

Yes, indeed, the "rich and famous" is not so easily keen attack again by financing, their wealth and affluence in a benchmarker orgy featuring an overmansions, even sinful display of extravagance and profligacy. What saddens me is that the very spectacular of these frivolity was been portrayed up not again in the society pages of our newspapers in the midst of hunger and destitution among the less privileged among our people.

I am thus constrained to reiterate here and now my earlier proposal that Congress should initiate a legislative inquiry on the scandalous display of wealth "in aid of legislation."

I keep asking: When will a day come be ever find an issue to seek judicial injunction against such thoughtless extravagants during a period of acute public woes pertinent to Article 21 of the Civil Code?

—RAYMUNDO C. HERNANDEZ JR.,
1421 Carlos St.,
Pateros, Makati City

Jun Lozada of NBN-ZTE fame not a candidate

THE PRESIDENT IS RIGHT ABOUT TO CLARify the growing confusion regarding the non-participation in the 2010 election of engineer Rodolfo Noel 'Jun' Lozada Jr., who is still under the supervisory program of the AMLSP and continues to be sheltered together with his family at the Lethodist Evangelical Seminary.

Under the supervisory program in witness protection, he is allowed to engage in any partisan political activity, more so in a political election, in order to maintain the (officially) neutral stance of the witness protection.

Engineer Rodolfo Noel 'Jun' Lozada Jr., or Jun Lozada of the NBN-ZTE fame, is not the person running under the senatorial ticket of PMP of Ex-President Joseph 'Erap' Estrada. He is also running under the name of Apostolic Lozada, who also goes by the nickname of Jun Lozada.

The AMLSP is fully committed to support Engineer Lozada in his crusade for the truth, especially in our still unsolved NBN-ZTE scandal, so that justice may prevail and those who are responsible for such act of plunder against the Filipino people are properly charged before an impartial court. We think all the people who matter to support Engineer Lozada in his quest.

We stand behind him in his decision not to run in the 2010 election for the sole reason that no deaths of self-interest should sabotage whatever inspiration he has given the Filipino people, particularly the youth. We understand the sacrifice he said his family have to encounter in order to stand up for what is right and for the truth. That is why we are making this statement to counter that the legacy of his crusade are evidence at or to self-less intent.

Mahalagi ang Buhay at Isinisiwalat!

—FR. JOSE BALLE SDS and
SR. MARY JOHN MANANZAN, OSB,
co-chairpersons,
Association of Major Religious
Superiors of the Philippines

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Use of ₱750-M windfall irks Vizcaya folk

By Melvin Gascon
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAYOMBONG, NUEVA VIZCAYA—OFFICIALS and civil society leaders have expressed outrage over the alleged extravagant spending of the ₱750-million that the provincial government collected last year from owners of an irrigation and power project in upland Alfonso Castañeda town.

Reports said Alfonso Castañeda officials had bought a fleet of sports utility vehicles from the town's share of real property taxes, or worth ₱237.5 million. "This is an outright disgrace. Some local officials who are now spending the money as will for their own benefit and enjoyment," said lawyer Nivenia Balsomo.

Board Member Patricia Dumlao Jr. said that in December, the municipality of Alfonso Castañeda acquired 14 brand-new units of Nissan Navara valued at ₱1.3 million each, two units of Nissan Terrano also worth ₱1.3 million each, and two units of Toyota Fortuner, said to be worth ₱1.6 million each.

Total cost of the purchase is about ₱26 million.

The vehicles were reportedly issued to each of the municipal officials, chiefs of offices, barangay chairs and education officials.

"There are restrictions set forth by our laws, as well as administrative orders issued by the [Commission on Audit] and [Department and Budget and Management] involving the purchase of vehicles. In this case, I think they went over board," Dumlao said.

The lawyers cited has failed to reach Alfonso Castañeda Mayor Jerry Bulgan through his mobile phone.

The municipality made the purchases in December from its share of the partial payment of ₱750 million by California Energy-Caseconan, the American company that owns and operates the Caseconan Multipurpose Power and Irrigation Project (CMPIP) there.

Pursuant to the Local Government code, the amount will be shared by the provincial, town and barangay governments where the project is located. The other half comprises the special education fund, which will be shared between the provincial and municipal governments.

CE/Caseconan paid the amount under a compromise agreement with the provincial government in an effort to stop the motion of the CMPIP due to tax debts totaling ₱1.7 billion, said lawyer Lotis Corrales, provincial special legal officer.

The American firm, however, made the payment under protest.

Corrales said the provincial legal office has given pieces of advice to Alfonso Castañeda officials on what to do with the money. "Whether they abide by it[would still be entirely up to them," he said.

Solomo said he would sue the officials responsible for the purchase of vehicles.

"We cannot allow this indiscriminate spending of people's money. There are many people who are starving, who cannot even afford to eat three sizeable meals a day, yet, here come people officials who waste people's money by buying these luxury vehicles," he said.

He cited a DBM circular which limits the purchase of vehicles only to ambulances, fire trucks, vehicles for mass transport and other utility vehicles only when these are necessary to the interest of public service.

NEWSBRIEFS

▪ MAGUINDANAO

Troop deployment

LIKELY-EVIL soldiers were deployed in Maguindanao on Saturday to preempt election-related violence in the island province, one of the hot spots on the Commission on Elections' list.

The soldiers will assist the provincial police in dismantling private armies and serve as "reinforcement" in the campaign against insurgency, the military said.

Earlier, the Comelec met with the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in a conference and asked the security commands to participate in ensuring peaceful and orderly elections in May.

Jonas Zaldies Zafra
Inquirer Southern Luzon

2 rebels slain in clash

TWO COMMUNIST rebels were killed and two soldiers were wounded in an encounter between government troops and New People's Army members on Monday in Barangay Binanga, Maguindanao town, Sonsogon, the military said.

The soldiers recovered five M-16 rifles, two Carbine rifles and five improvised bombs from the rebels.

The wounded soldiers, identified as Pfc Christopher M. Madera and Pfc Arie D. Fernandez, were brought to the Datu Odilon Sinsuat hospital, while the two rebels were brought to the Datu Piang hospital.

Jonas Zaldies Zafra
Inquirer Southern Luzon

▪ LAGUNA

Village dad yields drugs

A MILITIA commander and two others were arrested in an anti-illegal drug operation on Calamba City in Laguna on Friday, police said.

Victor Hilvano, 36, a councilor in Barangay Lawa, and his companions, Randy Pelayo, 33, and Joselito Garcia, 41, were arrested in Barangay Parian, said Senior Supt. Marvelo Labador, provincial police director.

The suspects yielded seven sachets of suspected shabu and a loaded .38-cal. pistol. They were detained at the city police station.

Marlon Cleve
Inquirer Southern Luzon

▪ CITY OF SAN FERNANDO

Tarlac son to yield

THE SON of the late guerrilla leader Luis Taruc said he would surrender after police on Monday raced him for fraudulent murder and attempted murder in connection with the shooting of his neighbor in Angeles City on Friday.

"I will face the case," Dr. Rizalino Taruc told the reporters in a telephone interview. He said he was waiting for further advice from his lawyers.

The Taruc has been filed at the city prosecutor's office, according to Senior Supt. Danilo Bacbacta, city police director.

Taruc allegedly shot Jason Lorenzo, 25, hitting him in the chest and back, a police report said.

Police said Gomez was celebrating his birthday in his house when Taruc came and confronted him about the noise his group was creating.

Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

SIMULOG KICKOFF
The Tayud Consolacion National High School won the Sinulog on Kabalitan-sa Lalawigan in the secondary division. The competition held in Cebu City Sunday kicked off the weeklong Sinulog festival that will last until this Sunday.

Rehab fund for typhoon victims in W. Visayas cut

By Nestor P Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—AFTER BEING delayed for more than a year, the rehabilitation fund for Western Visayas areas that were damaged by Typhoons "Frank" may further shrivel by more than half of the requested budget.

The Pagbasa Fund has been reduced to only ₱4 billion from ₱8 billion, Presidential Adviser for Western Visayas Raul Bacalso said in a telephone interview on Friday.

Bacalso, executive director of the Task Force Bangon Bisaya, said the cut was due to the failure of the Senate to pass the Simplified Net Income Tax Scheme which was the intended source of the fund.

"There is no more time for the Senate to pass the measure since it is rumored its session this morning," Bacalso said.

The ₱4 billion for Western Visayas will be part of the ₱12-billion calamity fund included in the supplemental budget for 2008. The ₱8 billion is intended for victims and areas ravaged by Typhoons "Ondoy" and "Pepeng," especially in Manila, southern and northern Luzon.

Western Visayas officials had originally sought ₱13 billion for the rehabilitation of highways, river and dams in Iloilo, Aklan, Capiz, Guimaras and Negros Occidental provinces, and the cities of Iloilo and Bacolod.

Typhoon Frank, which struck on June 21, 2008, triggered the worst flooding in Western Visayas and left at least 331 persons dead in the region including 225 who remained missing and presumed dead. At least 2,333 others were injured.

The typhoon affected 375,399 families or 1,861,544 persons in Western Visayas. Around 166,503 persons or 33,307 families were evacuated at the height of the flooding, according to the flood report on the disaster by the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council and Office of Civil Defense.

The hardest hit were Iloilo City and the capital town of Kalibo in Aklan which was covered with mud for weeks after the typhoon.

The typhoon also destroyed 43,099 houses and damaged 140,348 others. Damage to infrastructure amounted to ₱6.4 billion while damage to agriculture reached ₱3.1 billion.

But with the much reduced fund, Bacalso said only the top priority projects and programs will push through. These include major bridges, roads, flood control projects, dredging of main rivers and shelter assistance for victims.

He said the government had already released around ₱3 billion from emergency funds of five agencies for the immediate repair of bridges and roads.

Western Visayas had earlier appealed to the national government to ensure that the long overdue assistance promised to the region by President Macapagal-Arroyo would be released amid the focus on the damage brought by typhoon Ondoy.

Congress had earlier approved a ₱10-billion supplemental budget to help the typhoon victims after the government's calamity funds were found to be depleted amid the massive damage of Ondoy.

Bacsal said with the failure to pass the bill appropriating the Bagbasan Fund, the transfer of a mechanism to manage the rehabilitation fund will also not push through.

He said the implementation of the projects would be left to the Task Force Bangon Bisaya, an inter-agency body chaired by Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Raul Gonzalez who is also Cabinet officer for regional development of Western Visayas.

Sugar alliance to oppose planned sugar importation

By Carla P Gomez
Inquirer Visayas

BACOLOD CITY—A SUGAR industry leader on Sunday said the members of the Philippine Sugar Alliance would oppose a planned government importation of sugar.

Manuel Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines, said the industry was at the peak of the milling season so the government did not need to import sugar at this time.

"We have sugar flowing out of the bodegas of every mill in the country," he said.

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) administrator Rafael Coscolluela on Friday quoted Trade Undersecretary Ernesto Magleya as having said that the government was considering importing sugar without subsidy to temper price increases.

Coscolluela has been raised over rising prices of sugar in the retail market that was at ₱47 a kilogram in Metro Manila and could reach ₱50.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap then proposed to import 20,000 metric tons of sugar but it has been pointed out that it might be a little too much, Coscolluela said.

He added that the disappearance of a total of 20,000 MT might be more appropriate.

But Lamata said the main cause of the high prices of refined sugar in Manila was the inventional operation of the Don Pedro Sugar Mill in Batangas.

He explained that the Don Pedro Sugar Mill had encountered mechanical problems so it could not operate fully and could not provide the usual supply in Metro Manila.

"The solution to that is for the government to send its Navy ships to Negros to haul all the refined sugar that are in the bodegas of the mills and ship them to Manila," he said.

Government importation of sugar goes against the principle of free enterprise, Lamata said.

He recalled that the government did not provide assistance to the sugar industry when the prices of sugar fell below production cost.

Lamata also disclosed that industry players would file cases against those who would import sugar at this time.

Coscolluela said the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Agriculture, not the SRA, have been tasked the sugar importation, taking Executive Order No. 804 as basis.

The EO authorizes the National Food Authority, Food Terminal Inc. and the Philippine International Trading Corp. to intervene in the stabilization of the supply of price of basic items.

The EO provides for the use expenditure subsidy that will enable the government to import sugar without making the consumer pay for the tariff, Coscolluela said.

The proposal would be discussed at a meeting with the Philippine Sugar Alliance today during which, the government representatives would raise their concern, he added.

Pols urged not to pay NPA permit to campaign

LUCENA CITY—WITH THE election season, a military official in Quezon province has advised candidates not to fall into the extortion schemes of the communist New People's Army (NPA).

Lt. Col. Gerardo Valencia Jr., head of the Army's 76th Infantry Battalion operating in some parts of the province's Lamon Bay and Bondoc Peninsula areas, told the bayanes over the phone that he had been making the rounds of local government units to his jurisdiction to appeal to election candidates not to give in to the money-making schemes of the communist rebels.

"The money that they (candidates) will give to the NPA will eventually be used against the people that they will be sworn to serve and protect," Valencia said.

During elections, the NPA demands that politicians campaigning in areas it controls pay the permit-to-campaign (PTC) or permit-to-win (PTW) fees.

Negotiations and mode of payment vary in different areas across the country.

Other NPA-run areas prefer **payment in kind** in needed items.

The payment could be caused through an ATM bank account or intermediaries.

Valencia said the PTC and PTW are the same extortion schemes the NPA uses.

"They are both plain and simple blackmail in exchange for an empty promise of ensuring the election. But how can that happen when those terrorists no longer enjoy the support of their traditional mass base? The people are already fed up and fed back on the NPA because of their long years of exacting forced material and physical support," said the army official.

Valencia said the military has yet to see a copy of the supposed PTW contract between the NPA and politicians.

He said the election fund-raising activities by the NPA could boost the recoiling communist influence in Quezon.

Quezon officials said they had yet to encounter NPA rebels offering PTW.

"I think the NPA will resort rub you about (PTC) would just cost a down. I'm only good for the PTC. How are they (NPA) to ensure the victory of a candidate especially in an automated election? Maybe, they can deliver votes in some remote areas. But for the entire locality, that's impossible," said an official who requested anonymity for security reasons.

He said paying PTC to the NPA is part of every election.

"We have a budget for that to avoid trouble. Besides, how can the police and the military possibly be present in the elections when we now only have very limited security backup due to the gun ban? We say candidates paying the NPA is much better option," said another local official. Bella C. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

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PSA AWARDS

Pacquiao Athlete of the Decade

By Cedrik P. Topas

MANNY PACQUIAO HAS CLAIMED ALMOST EVERY ACCOLADE IN boxing, doing so with an economy of blow and punch.

With no one coming close to the impact of his exploits, Pacquiao, the only seven-division world boxing champion, emerged as the hands-down choice as **Athlete of the Decade by the Philippine** Sportswriters Association which will hold its annual awards Night on March 1.

Having been named PSA Athlete of the Year five times this decade—from 2003 to 2004, then in 2006 and 2008, Pacquiao was elevated to the Hall of Fame last year.

Few surpassed the 30-year-old Sarangani Representative's record of seven PSA honors. Unlike Lydia de Vega, who won the prize eight times in the track-and-field event, Pacquiao has had to share the spotlight with other athletes in other sports.

Only Pacquiao won in a field of his own.

He won 26 of his 27 fights, 21 of them coming by way of knockout, to the panel decide with Mexican great Erik Morales answering his record with a unanimous, but close decision in the bloody first installment of their classic trilogy in 2005.

Morales felt Pacquiao's fury in their next two showdowns, the last in January 2006 when the Mexican great absorbed a third-round knockout.

There were no stopping Pacquiao from there with at least six Hall of Fame-bound fighters falling by the wayside, including Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Manuel Marquez, Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton and Miguel Cotto.

Pacquiao proved his 2003 stoppage of Barrera was no fluke by carving out a unanimous decision win over the Mexican in October 2007.

What made Pacquiao's feat more remarkable was the fact that he won—in just two years—all his fights in five different divisions, beginning with Marquez, Diaz, De La Hoya, Hatton and Cotto.

Pacquiao fought only twice last year, but 2009 was not a year for his biggest prize.

He was devastating in his second-round knockout of Hatton, the British star limited to only three rounds in the 140-lb class.

Then Pacquiao joined his seventh title at the expense of Cotto, the Puerto Rican who couldn't match the Filipino's speed and power despite his size advantage.

"No doubt, he's the greatest fighter of this era," Hall of Fame promoter Bob Arum said.

RIGHT! Pacquiao: Nobody comes close to his stature.

Manny going for knockout versus Clottey

By Ray Luarca

A FIFTH STRAIGHT knockout.

That will be Manny Pacquiao's target when he makes his World Boxing Organization welterweight title against Joshua Clottey on March 13 in the Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

Matchmaker Freddie Roach, who has accurately predicted the knockout stoppages of David Diaz, Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton and Miguel Cotto in succession, told FightHype.com Monday that they want to give Clottey many inside the distance.

"I think we're going to get him (Clottey) in 10 easily, but he's definitely a tough guy to knock out," said Roach. "That's our goal, to knock him out and be the first one to do that [against Clottey]."

The 32-year-old Clottey, who currently has no contender's spot, has never been knocked out in compiling a 35-3 record, with 20 KOs.

"It's a hard fight, of course, because he's a true welterweight and a big, strong kid, so Pacquiao is going to have to really fight smart with his speed," added Roach, who thinks Clottey will suffer a better fight than World Boxing Association super welterweight (154-lb) champion Yuri Foreman.

According to Roach, Pacquiao needs to box, in and out, side to side, and be very tactical because Clottey is a strong, big puncher with an iron chin.

Roach also hinted that there will be no catch weight with Pacquiao now comfortable at 147 lb. Pacquiao dethroned Cotto at 145 last November.

"When Manny's eating, he likes to stay at the weight he and gets to eat nice before the weigh-in, he's happy," said Roach. "That's when he performs at his best, when he's walking and is a good mood."

Despite Pacquiao's perceived advantages over Clottey, Roach doesn't intend to get complacent.

This early, the Hall of Fame trainer has enlisted the services of '104 and 1-hit pounders to square with Pacquiao when the pound for pound king begins training at Roach's Wild Card Gym in Hollywood.

On the list are German Pelli Straite, the WBO middleweight champion, and Mexican Saúl Roberto Garcia, who fights at 154 and boasts a 30-2 record.

Roach says Khan will also be coming in to provide speed in sparring, and Roach, adding that a 140-lb champion from Ukraine is also offering his services.

Pacquiao plans to leave for Los Angeles on Jan. 17.

BITBIT: Decision-ide

POC welcomes Senate probe on Bitbit case

By Jane Nimuera

THE PHILIPPINE OLYMPIC COMMITTEE yesterday welcomed a Senate inquiry into the cycling fiasco at the recent 25th Southeast Asian Games in Laos.

POC spokesperson Jove Buenaventura said the inquiry, endorsed by Sen. Pia Cayetano, would give the local Olympic body a chance to refute allegations by cyclist Bitbit Bitbit, who blamed the POC for his failure to compete in Laos.

Bitbit, the defending champion in the women's road race, reportedly told Cayetano that POC president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco Jr was wrong when he "pressured" him to withdraw from the competitions.

"This is an opportunity for us to set the record straight," Buenaventura quoted Cojuangco as saying. "It's something that will put every thing to order."

Earlier reports said the 31-year-old Bitbit signed a mandatory sympathizing with the 12 other members of the cycling squad who were barred from participating in the 16th Games because they belonged to a cycling federation not recognized by the world governing body in cycling, Union Cycliste Internationale, but has the blessing of the POC.

Bitbit, who was eligible to race as a member of the UCI-recognized national cycling body headed by Taguig-Pateros lawmaker "Bambol" Tolentino, later claimed that she was forced by the POC to sign the declaration withdrawing the cyclists from the competition.

"It's all on record. What's there to worry about?" said Buenaventura, quoting Cojuangco.

Buenaventura explained that Bitbit personally appealed to Cojuangco to let her compete only after the humiliation of being the problem of the ISF cycling squad was eliminated in the SEAG Federation.

"We hope she tells the truth during the Senate hearings," said Buenaventura.

COJUANGCO

Satria Muda overpower Barracudas

INDONESIA SATRIA Muda Bintan strengthened their two-fold bid for the top semifinal berth by crushing the Brunei Barracuda, 98-84, Sunday in the hosts' Basketball League at the Britamo Arena in Jakarta.

CHAMPIONS	W	L
Philippines	3	0
Indonesia	2	1
Singapore	2	1
Malaysia	1	2
Brunei	0	3

SEMIFINALS
(Best-of-three Regional Rankers)
4 p.m. — Thailand vs. Philippine Patriots
Patriots

Satria Muda, which recently dropped two Filipino imports Fenwy Sujar from its roster, posted their eighth victory in 12 outings to move just a game behind the 9-4 mark of the league-leading Philippine Patriots.

The Singapore Slingers, third with a 7-6 mark, were trying to boost their case but upstart the Kuala Lumpur Dragons in last night's game at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

The three-week elimination of the six-nation tournament will wrap up in two weeks.

The Barracudas, sentenced by Filipino coach Beng Bitoon, dropped to 4-7 for a share of fourth place with the Dragons.

Arain Pellazimino fueled a team-high 22 points, while American import Nakeia Miller added 19 rounders and 11 rebounds for Satria Muda. — Jasmine B. Payo

Brunei (98) — Ambakeri 12, Miller 10, Anthony 14, Ali 2, Ismail 2, Ahmad 2, Ghani 8, Hj Zainudin 10, Zainudin 2, Hj Zainudin 2, Shamsuddin 2

Satria Muda (98) — Lim 2, Pellazimino 22, Miller 19, Aswin 10, Ferdinand 7, Tan 2, Sutanto 2, Sumarno 2, Sujar 12

Quarters: 19-25, 47-52, 73-82, 84-98

For Mr. Jose Cojuangco Jr., a rededication

BARE EYE

Rhoda Trinidad

HE WOULD BE VERY HAPPY TO HEAR the sweet sound of victory. He also spoke of plans for the establishment of an integrated national rice milling system that will greatly cut down spoilage and benefit palay farmers.

Jose "Peping" Cojuangco, 75, smiling and moody of cheeks, was the complete basho when he hosted lunch for members of the Manila media before leaving Laos for Manila last month.

Mr. Cojuangco also talked about putting up a new sports complex featuring tennis on a big chunk of Hacienda Cristina, which his family will donate, to Cielito.

* * *

But after events of the past days, we have no choice but to request Mr. Cojuangco to read this column, write us immediately after that unreasonable meeting at the Ilong Chan Palace Hotel on the fringes of the great Mekong, which appeared to the Japanese Sports section on Dec. 12 while the POC president was still in Vientiane.

Superstitious are a big factor, but Mr. Cojuangco obviously missed this piece, which we redelivered to him in a previous of recipient and forwarding.

Kindly read again.

* * *

VIENTIANE, LAOS—There's no need anymore to confirm how this capital has started to become a favorite weekend destination.

The road is iconic, Hewitt Bangkok when this colonial. That capital was still compelled by cool commerce.

The big plus, of course, is tax incentives, cheap and road data-mine of the area, and thankfully free of Bangkok's looming hostilities at daytime.

Anyway, speaking of the Philippine participation in the Games here, the opinions of the ISF sports superbrass, Philippine Olympic Committee president Jose Cojuangco Jr., has visibly fallen in love with Vientiane, the wonders in particular.

Mr. Cojuangco, here on a visit last April, said the madness around here is at its soothing best close to Christmas.

* * *

"This, despite the difficulties, is a beautiful experience and we must thank our athletes—also have worked hard and sacrificed for the country," Bag," Cojuangco told a group of Manila newsmen whom he hosted to a Chinese feaster at the Don Chan Palace hotel on Thursday.

The biggest difficulty of course, was the failure of the 13-strong ISF cycling team to participate after duty-wise sent toward Germany by the Union Cycliste Internationale, ruling body in world cycling.

Cojuangco insisted no words in denouncing the International federation, which left the best of the cycling participation in the hands of the national sports association (NSA) it recognizes.

"I have no desire to supervise, nor never to intervene," Cojuangco reminded, standing firm on his belief that the POC has other side equip to mostly Filipinos athletes the participation in events like the SEA Games and the Olympics.

* * *

Indeed, Cojuangco was greatly hurt by his decision to pull out cyclist Wendee Bitbit, strong gold medal contender, when other was sacrificed for the sake of solidarity with her banished teammates.

However, one pitiful sight which Cojuangco said he would not get over was that of Filipino athletes wearing nothing more than track suits—"provided by the POC, instead of parade uniforms"—during the opening day parade.

Cojuangco, who asked his media guests to focus on the ancillary and achievements of the athletes, has vowed to expose alleged irregularities in the handing of the national contingent.

NCA World Championship Derby fires off today

THE DEFENDING CHAMPS AGAINST OPEN THE stage to what is billed as the world's biggest and toughest weightlifting event, the World Championship Derby today at the Trinoma Sports Arena in Pasig City.

The International tour, with the elite American contenders at the vanguard, collide with their Philippine counterparts in the championship that will also hold fights on Thursday and Saturday.

Here are organizing the trophy for the United States circuit again are Tom Wilson and Boyet and Allen Gumbed, George Torres, Donny Santiago, PLAns Dave Werlau Barbella, among others.

They will be up against NCA big guns and guest contenders including Manolo Lopez, Tom Mayor, Jesse Mercado, Lito Orillana, former champion Ricky Mercio, Philip Ocampo, Capt. Gore, Soc Borg Revilla, Classic Siegers, Bong Duarte and Manny Co to the derby sponsored by Inquirer Complexion.

Other guest contenders are Jay Jones, Sonny Barrameda, Jeff Mercado, Jun Gonzales, Mario Cruz, Dennis Cruz, Rolando Cruz, Rene Rosas, Rolando Mendoza, Ronnie Cabanit-Gonzales, Jay Jay Lopez, Jay Ocampo, Rudy Tan, Efren Zarate, Danny Yana, Charlie Ang, Rudy Hernandez and James Ty.

PBA supports PBL-Liga Pilipinas merger

By Jaymie W. Payo

A MERGER BETWEEN THE PHILIPPINE Basketball League (PBL) and Liga Pilipinas moved to take shape yesterday with no less than the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) pushing for the union of the two commercial leagues.

"We believe that the two leagues can work together," PBL commissioner Orino Trinidad said after its initial talks with representatives of the PBA and Liga Pilipinas yesterday.

"Liga will retain its personality as a regional league, while the PBL will retain its own personality as a developmental league," added Trinidad. "Even the PBA stands to benefit. Down the merger."

Joining Trinidad in the "first round of talks" were Liga president and CEO Ricki Bala, PBA chair Leo Rivera and Liga technical chief Percy Macaraya.

Absent said the merger, targeted for a February or March kickoff, can also help improve the leagues' officiating.

"Admittedly, we see opportunities for improvement in the referees' ranks," said Alvarez. "We can have a training academy and the best performers can look forward to officiating in the PBA."

"We're looking at the relevance of the merger to the Philippine basketball landscape," added Trinidad.

"If the two leagues become one, will it become more vibrant? It does not follow that if the merger becomes a reality it will indeed be stronger. So we're carefully looking at the rationale behind the merger."

Trinidad said the summary of yesterday's talks will be presented to the respective league's board members, before their next meeting on Jan. 25.

"We complement each other," said Alvarez. "We can have some PBA teams adopt PBL and Liga teams. We can lend some of our assistant coaches or even our reserve players, for them to have a decent exposure."

SALA

TRINIDAD

Williams, Intal shine off sick bay

STA. LUCIA REALTY'S BELLE WILLIAMS AND Batangas Glenforte JC Intal both came out of injury bay in sterling forms.

Williams and Intal helped their solid numbers the past week to lead their respective teams to a pair of crucial wins in the final stretch of the BFC-PBA Philippine Cup.

"Belly's been working hard since he was given the go-signal to play," said Sta. Lucia coach Boyet Fernandez of the PBA-An forward, who was diagnosed with a blood disorder and ran out last year's season-ending Fiesta Conference.

Williams averaged 20 points, 10 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 2.5 steals in the Realtors' twin victories over Rizal Shine and Burger King.

Intal, who also sat out on the past due to a sweat gland disorder, helped the Kings improve to 11-6 after turning 17.5 points, 9.5 rebounds, 2 assists and 1.5 steals.

The 6-foot-3 Intal also emerged in a career-high 20 points in the Kings' 108-97 Christmas Day triumph over the Coca-Cola Tigers.

The two shared the BFC/Accel-PBA Press Corps Player of the Week honors.

Jaymie W. Payo

CLEVELAND Cavaliers center Shaquille O'Neal barrels his way against Portland forward LaMarcus Aldridge.

LeBron hits 41 as Cavs survive gritty Blazers

PORTLAND, OREGON—LEBRON JAMES had 41 points and 10 rebounds as the Cleveland Cavaliers held off a fourth-quarter Portland rally to beat the Trail Blazers, 106-94, on Sunday.

Shaquille O'Neal had 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who won their sixth straight against the Blazers.

James was 8 for 9 from the floor for 20 points in the first quarter alone. He finished 13 of 19 from the field and made 12 of 14 free-throw attempts.

Brandon Roy scored 34 points for the Blazers, who rallied to tie it at 87 with 8:35 left after trailing by as many as 17 points in the second half.

At Los Angeles, Andrew Bynum had 17 points and a career-high 18 rebounds as Los Angeles avoided its first three-game losing streak in nearly two years, dumping Milwaukee, 99-77.

Shannon Brown added 19 points, Jordan Farmar scored 13 of his 17 in the second half, Kobe Bryant had 12 points on 4 of 21 shooting, and Derek Fisher 11 for the defending NBA champions.

At Washington, Chris Paul scored eight of his 26 points in the final three minutes to lead New Orleans to its sixth straight win, by beating Washington, 115-110.

At Toronto, Rajon Rondo had 22 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds for his first triple-double of the season, and Rasheed Wallace scored a season-high 29 points to Boston's seventh straight win over the Raptors, 114-107.

AP

Baghdatis, Gasquet thru; Jankovic falls

SYDNEY—JOSEPHINE ALSTERIA

Fast Open finalist Marcos Baghdatis beat hard wildcard entry Nick Lindahl, 6-2, 7-5, on Monday to reach the second round of the Sydney International, a key warmup tournament for the season's first major.

The seventh-seeded Jelena Jankovic went out in a 5-7, 6-1, 7-5 first-round loss to Hungary's Agnes Szavay.

Baghdatis, who lost the 2006 Australian final to Roger Federer, only got one-third of his first serves into play, but was only broken once in the match and broke Lindahl's serve twice in each set.

In other men's first round matches, Frenchman Richard Gasquet beat Spaniard Albert Ramos Lopez, 6-3, 6-4.

The draw opened up to Gasquet's bracket when his countryman, top-seeded Gael Monfils, withdrew due to an injured right shoulder.

At the Hobart International, second-seeded Shahar Peer of Israel advanced to the second round with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Olivia Rogowska of Australia.

Meanwhile, Federer will use warm up for the Australian Open at this week's Kooyong Classic in Melbourne, prompting organizers to target Britain Andy Murray for the same eight-spot in the invitational.

AP, Reuters

BAGHDATIS

Tiu sets new RP record in drag racing kickoff

By Romina S. Acosta

DEFENDING CHAMPION JONATHAN TIU set a new quarter-mile record in edging the Quick 8 division of the 2010 Philippine Drag Racing Championship Northern Series opening race held recently at the Clark International Speedway in Pampanga.

Running unopposed in the final race, Tiu clocked 9.006 seconds, shattering his previous best time of 9.223. It was a feat that, according to experts, will take a long time for any driver—not even Tiu—to surpass.

Pepi Santos also posted an impressive time of 9.668 seconds which stood as the new Quicker Four Wheel and Quickest Honda Carbureted in the country.

American V8 muscle cars dominated the Pro Class with former United States serviceman John Ryda winning in 11.430 seconds in his new Chevrolet 1968 Camaro.

Fellow expatriate William Hand was second in 11.813 seconds while another former US serviceman, Steve Caldwell, checked in third in 12.155.

Comeback king Mario Miranda also got his share of the limelight with a victory in the Import class, posting 12.052 seconds in his final duel with newcomer Gary Dombrique (13.311 seconds).

Rong Mitoza was third in 12.398.

Topping the other divisions were Vinney Moya (Sportsman) and Michael Tiu (Bike Street).

SPORTSWATCH

Romasanta, Davis Cup chiefs in Forum

THE COMMISSIONER OF PHILIPPINE SPORTS and Japan in the Asian Dreams join as the main topics of discussion in today's PSA Forum at the Philippine Sports Commission dining hall inside the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex in Manila.

Philippine Olympic Committee spokesperson Jonty Romasanta joins PSC Davis Cup team coordinator Randy Villanueva and non-playing team captain Dindo Duarte in the weekly session aired live over DZSR Sports Radio 918 and presented by Gatorade, Pepsi, Accel and Mobility.

Also gracing the 10:30 a.m. public sports program is Mac Salud, service product manager of Eastern Communications, which is holding a badminton tournament.

Shortly after the PSA Forum, sportswriters will have the chance to interview presidential candidate Gilbert Teodoro as he raised the boards at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex in the afternoon.

Kidzhoops tournament slated at RFM gym

THE SOCCER'S SEASON OF THE ALL-DUNDORF'S BASKETBALL tournament for kids eight to 11 years old comes off the ramps with its first conference tending day on Jan. 17 at the RFM Gym on Pioneer Street, Mandaluyong City.

The tourney starts at 2 p.m. after the 1 p.m. registration. The tournament proper kicks off on Feb. 7.

Solid hoops is heaping this three divisions: 10-U, 12-U and 14-U.

Young Lagers are encouraged to join the co-ed tourney where they are assured of four league games and one tournament game officiated by certified referees. Playing jerseys will be provided.

Only 40 slots per division will be accommodated. For inquiries, text 09189464504 or 09157781934, call 7360410 or log on to www.kidzhoops.com.

RTU hosts 2010 SCUAA Metro meet

RIZAL TECHNOLOGICAL University has been chosen as host campus of the 22nd Southern Colleges and Universities Athletic Association's (SCUAA) MOR meet. The games will be held from Jan. 18 to 23.

Competing in the games are athletes from the seven schools that make up SCUAA's chapter in Metro Manila, namely RTU, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Philippine Normal University, Technological University of the Philippines, Dalubhasa "Simang" Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology, Philippine School of Aeronautical and Mariktime Polytechnic.

Opening ceremonies start at 2 p.m. on Monday with a parade from the Mandaluyong city hall to the RTU Mandaluyong campus.

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DID YOU KNOW

REVOLUTIONARY general Pio del Pilar was born in San Pedro de Makati (now Makati) in the 1860s. He was one of the aides of Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo. Del Pilar resisted American rule in the 1890s, and was captured in 1900. He was later given amnesty and was made to take an oath of allegiance to the American regime. **Cyril L. Bautista, Inquirer Research**

Another Black Nazarene devotee dies

Unidentified victim succumbs to severe injuries after falling from carriage

By Jeannette I. Andrade

A THIRD BLACK NAZARENE DEVOTEE HAS DIED after he suffered severe head and body injuries when he fell off the carriage carrying the centuries-old icon during the procession on Saturday.

The still unidentified man—who was described as between 22 and 28 years old and at least 5'10" tall—passed away at around 8:45 p.m. on Sunday as he was being treated at at Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

PSSupt. Jaime Gonzales, in of the Manila Police District homicide section and barbecue Grandes, the health and safety officer of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene (Quiapo Church), had told them that the man was among the two million devotees who joined Saturday's procession.

According to Gonzales, the man climbed into the carriage bearing the Black Nazarene. He managed to reach the image before he fell and lost consciousness, prompting protestors organizers to bring him to the nearest hospital.

The police said the man was not carrying a wallet, apparently to avoid being victimized by thieves who mingle with devotees.

His body has been taken to the Cruz funeral parlor for autopsy and embalming.

The latest death brings to three the number of fatalities in this year's Black Nazarene procession.

The two others were identified as Bernardino Bustillo, 40 and Rodrigo Ocampo, 42, of Apellanes, Zobel, Malaul City.

Bustillo was also injured when he fell after he climbed into the carriage carrying the image.

Ocampo, on the other hand, died of cardiac arrest.

Ombudsman urged to suspend Makati councilor facing graft raps

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

GOVERNMENT PROSECUTORS have sought the suspension of a Makati City councilor who is facing a graft case filed by the Office of the Ombudsman in 2006.

In a motion filed with the First Division of the Sandiganbayan, the prosecutors asked the anti-graft court to place Councilor Dennis Aquiligan under preventive suspension in connection with the graft charges filed against him and former Makati Mayor Elenita Binay wife of Ombudsman Mayor Jejomar Binay.

"It is most respectfully prayed of this Honorable Court that an Order be issued suspending the accused from his office and any other public office which he may occupy pending trial," the prosecution's motion read.

Aquiligan and Elenita Binay are accused of buying more than P13 million worth of allegedly overpriced furniture for the Makati City Hall in 2000.

Aquiligan was the head of the city's general services department at the time.

The prosecution said that under the anti-graft and corrupt practices act, public officers facing any offense involving "fraud upon government or public funds or property" should be suspended while the case is pending.

It added, "The prosecution maintains that the information is valid and invoking the mandate of the law and jurisprudence, suspension of the accused pending litigation is mandatory."

In October 2006, the Ombudsman filed the case against Elenita Binay, Aquiligan and three officials of the private company from which the allegedly overpriced pieces of furniture were bought.

Two months later, the Ombudsman filed an amended complaint, dropping the three private respondents from the charge sheet.

Based on court records, the prosecutors have terminated its presentation of evidence in June 2009 after submitting its formal offer of exhibits.

WATERY RETREAT

With the temperature picking up in the afternoons, people have started looking for a place where they can escape from the heat like at Pinaod Dam in Pandi, Bulacan, Mind. JOAN BONDOC

BIRD HAVEN

A flock of birds rest and look for food on C-5 Extension in Barangay Sto. Niño, Parañaque City. ROY LUSTRIA

Water firm asks agency to form task force on El Niño

By Amy R. Remo

AYALA-OWNED MANILA Water Co. Inc. is seeking the creation of an interagency task force on El Niño to prepare Metro Manila for a possible long dry spell over the next few months, according to a company official.

Jerry Sevilla, Manila Water manager for corporate communications, warned that the early to the year, the water level at Angat Dam in Bulacan was already 202 meters above sea level (masl)—the lowest level recorded in the past six years.

"Normally, around this time, the water level should be around 208 masl," he noted, adding that the critical level for the dam was 180 masl.

Sevilla said that Manila Water, together with Metropolitan Waterworks Sewerage System and Maynilad Water Services Inc., had submitted a separate letter to the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) last week, asking it to look into the water supply situation in Metro Manila in view of a possible dry spell.

The NWRB is responsible for ensuring the optimum exploitation, utilization, development, conservation and protection of the country's water resources.

Sevilla further said that the three companies required a formal declaration from concerned government agencies on whether the looming El Niño would be mild, moderate or strong, so they could already prepare contingency measures as early as this month.

To further illustrate the urgency of the issue, Sevilla noted that from Sunday midnight to 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level at the Angat dam had already declined by nine centimeters.

He added that should the country experience a prolonged dry spell, it would mean that the water concessionaires, namely Manila Water and Maynilad, would have to decrease the amount of water to distribute to their clients.

Currently, Manila Water provides 1,200 million liters of water per day (mld) to the east zone concession area while Maynilad supplies water to the west zone area of the metropolis.

Metro Manila's 15 million residents share 97 percent of raw water supply from the Angat Dam and Reservoir in Bulacan. Angat has an existing capacity of 4,000 mld for domestic supply.

Sevilla assured the public that Manila Water is putting in place several measures—including looking for alternative water sources—that could help address a possible prolonged dry spell.

"Even if there is a prolonged dry spell, we are still looking at making water supply available for our consumers 24/7. But we're looking instead at supply management and pressure reduction measures," he said.

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INQUIRER

Manila police chief implements reshuffle

By Jeannette I. Andrade

THE MANILA POLICE DISTRICT (MPD) implemented a reshuffle among some of its men yesterday, a day before its founding anniversary.

MPD director Chief Supt. Rodolfo Magsilang said the reassignments involved about 60 commanders of Station police stations 3 commander Supt. Reynaldo Sapirala to the National Capital Region Police Office.

Appointed to Sapirala's stead was Supt. Jose Rodagio Jr., who used to head the Special Operations Unit.

On the other hand, Supt. Orlando Yebin was tapped to replace Supt. Teodoro Gutlo. I commander Supt. Roderick Mariano who was designated to head the District Operations Division.

Supt. Erasmo Rafael, former station 10 commander, will take over from Mariano. Tondo station 2 commander Supt. Rogelio Rosales who will now head the District Personnel and Human Resources Development Division.

Meanwhile, former MPD Ermita station 9 commander Supt. Prudencio Bernal was reassigned in the SOU. Cruz police station 5 while Superintendents James Alella and Abad Cue were named as the new commanders of the Pandacan and Ermita police stations 10 and 11, respectively.

Other appointees were former MPD District 3 commander Supt. Ernesto Tendero who was named chief of the District Logistics Office while former MPD station 11 commander Supt. Nelson Yabut was tapped to head the District Police Community Relations Division.

Magsilang said the revamp would strengthen the MPD's continuing programs in keeping peace and order in the city.

QC gov't seeks completion of projects

By Julie M. Aurelio

THE QUEZON CITY GOVERNMENT is hoping to complete several major infrastructure projects before Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr.'s term ends in June.

In a statement, Belmonte said he was expecting the completion of a medical facility at the Quezon City General Hospital (QCGH) which would give indigents access to affordable health care.

"There is a need to do those projects to define Quezon City as a model place to live and work in. We have to finish all those projects," Belmonte said.

The mayor, who is on his third and last term, is running for congressman in the city's fourth district.

The new medical facility of QCGH is being built on a portion of the hospital's (heir) factory property in Barangay Bahay Toro.

The facility will cost the city government P558 million, Belmonte said.

Only recently, a new pedestrian underpass connecting the Quezon Memorial Circle (QMC) to the Elliptical area was completed.

The structure, which cost P86 million, is wider than the overpass connecting Quezon City Hall to QMC.

Meanwhile, the Philcoa-QMC overpass near the gate of the Department of Agrarian Reform will be torn down and relocated to another area on Elliptical Road.

Belmonte called on city government employees and officials to maintain the values of hard work, competitiveness, trustworthiness and integrity even as the city government is set to be turned over to new officials in June.

"Competition and innovation are the name of the game and we are up to the challenge. This is an achievement for the city," he said.

2 suspected motorbike thieves killed

By Julie M. Aurelio

TWO SUSPECTED MOTORCYCLE thieves were shot dead in an encounter with anti-car theft operatives in Quezon City on Sunday night.

The police have found out that the suspects' motorcycle had been stolen early this month on Visayas Avenue, its former plate had also been unearthed with.

The two were were killed in the vicinity of Central and Visayas Avenues in Barangay Culiat after they opened fire on operatives of the Quezon City Police District's anti-carnapping Mobile unit.

Senior chief Senior Insp. Rodolfo Mayoralo said his men were conducting spotting operations in the area—checking suspicious cars and the license plates matched the model and type of vehicle it was attached to—when they saw two men on a motorcycle who were not wearing helmets.

The operatives were led by Senior deputy head Insp. Celso Dimapan.

"Our men were about to call their attention when the suspects saw the patrol car ... and sped away toward Common wealth Avenue," Mayoralo said.

Opened fire

The anti-car theft operatives chased the two men and asked them to pull over but instead of complying, the suspects opened fire on their pursuers.

Mayoralo said the policemen fired back at the two men, killing them on the spot.

The police official said a closer inspection of license plate of the black Kawasaki motorcycle the pair was riding on showed that it had been tampered with.

Mayoralo explained that the plate originally read 4179 PB but someone had attached stickers to change it to 4278 BE.

The suspects, who have yet to be identified, were described as between 20 and 25 years old, around 5'6" tall, of medium build and with fair complexion.

METROBRIEFS

School suspends classes due to bomb threat

CLASSES at the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Pasig (PLP) were suspended yesterday following a bomb scare. Fortunately, the threat turned out to be a false one as responding policemen found no actual explosive devices in the school compound located on Alkalde Jose Street in Barangay Kapasigan, Pasig City. Senior Supt. Jessie Dardina, acting Pasig police chief, said in a report to the Eastern Police District that a Special Weapons and Tactics team was deployed to the PLP compound at around 8:15 a.m. yesterday. This was after a bomb threat was received by one of the students through a text message from cell phone number 0908 3488277. Although the threat turned out to be empty, Dean of Academic Affairs Alicia M. Bala decided to suspend classes for the day to ensure the safety of students and faculty members.

Beverly T. Ramaroso

Bible Society marks National Bible Week

THE PHILIPPINE Bible Society (PBS) has launched a Preschool in celebration of National Bible Week (NBW) this year. A campaign to conduct public readings of the Bible nationwide, 1-Preschool is a cooperative effort by PBS and local churches to bring God's Word closer to Filipinos and encourage everyone to explore its riches and relevance to their lives. This year's NBW will be held from Jan. 29 to 31 while National Bible Sunday will be on Jan. 31. For more details, call the PBS communications department at 3261777 local 609 or visit www.bible.org.ph.

Pio del Pilar Educational Institution reunion

THE PIO del Pilar Educational Institution Class of 1985 presents "Kilalanin Mo Ako" Years," a silver reunion and get together on July 17, 7 p.m., at the Makati Park and Garden, Kalayaan West Rotonda, Makati City. For more details, visit www.ppp85.com or call Ryonel Belen: 09 08 4918828, Dotto Alvarado, 0922-829 9364, Alyce Asuncion-Ruiz, 0927-3516529, and Rubie Dacuma, 0929-1724818.

STARTING THE WEEK RIGHT Workers get busy as they clean up the United Nations Avenue station of the Light Rail Transit Line 1 in Manila. AMY ALIPIO

Faith is all in the mind

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE death of three devotees and injuries to 400 others during the Black Nazarene procession, Manila Archbishop Cardenal Cardinal Rosales criticized the "commercialization" of faith by devotees on the religious icon.

But can you blame the devotees for going overboard in showing their faith to the Black Nazarene?

Countless miracles have been attributed to the centuries-old image brought here by the Spaniards from Mexico.

Miracles happen because people believe in the impossible.

Some people were cured of incurable diseases because of their faith in the image.

"So, ye believe, so shall it be done unto you," says the Bible.

Believe all in the mind.

* * *

Miracles happen every day because of people's faith.

For instance, a patient suffering from cancer of the throat was told that a new machine would cure his condition.

He could neither read nor write, nor was he informed about any of the instruments or procedures of medical practice.

When he first sat down in the doctor's office and a thermometer was inserted in his mouth so the doctor could have his temperature, he thought the thermometer was the machine.

The doctor, well-versed in psychology, played along and after leaving the thermometer in the patient's mouth for 30 minutes, asked him to come back in two days.

Three weeks of "treatment" with a thermometer cured the patient's cancer!

Obviously, it wasn't the thermometer that did it. It was faith!

(From "Three Magic Words—The Key to Power, Peace and Plenty" by U.S. Andersen)

ON TARGET

RAMON FARIÑAS

Again, as you think or believe as it is

* * *

I doff my hat off to Pastor Pilarena (2) Mayor Edward Hagedorn for preserving the hospital and doctor's bills of a breast cancer patient.

I sought the help of Hagedorn's after the patient, a woman in her 50s who lives near my farm in a mountainous area in the city in a humble, "appreciated fee."

The mayor, whose wife Ellen is a cancer survivor, didn't have second thoughts about spending his own money for the woman's operation and hospital stay.

He rejected my proposal that he send my friend's entire bill to the hospital and doctor's bills to me.

The bill amounted to a fortune, by the patient's standards.

* * *

And you know why the bill amounted to a fortune?

Because the woman and her family got a private room in a private hospital instead of staying in a charity ward!

Wow, big time!

I am so embarrassed because the woman hasn't said "thank you" to Hagedorn after her release from the hospital.

In behalf of that woman, I say: Thank you very much, Mayor. You really have a big heart.

And to that woman, I say, "Salamat ang sa Iya!"

* * *

I'm reminded of Jesus of Nazareth who cured 10 lepers, according to the Bible.

Of the 10, only one came back to thank Jesus.

Jesus was disappointed by the ingratitude of the 11 cured lepers.

Japan to come clean on secret nuke deals with US

TOKYO—TO THE GOVERNment's critics, it was a long and shocking list of official stonewalling: Agreements keep hidden in Foreign Ministry files allowed nuclear-armed US warships to enter Japanese ports, violating a hallowed principle of postwar Japan. Yet their very existence was officially denied.

Now, in a clear break from the past, a new prime minister has gone where none of his predecessors dared go: He has ordered a panel of ministry officials and academics to investigate the secret agreements.

The findings, due out this month, are part of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's outstripping campaign to wrest power from the bureaucracy and make government more open from under the conservatives, who ruled Japan for most of the past 50 years.

They also could inevitably public debate about the future of Japan's long-standing security alliance with the US, which has many fans. Hatoyama, a liberal who took office in September, has called for making the relationship more balanced, starting with efforts to revise an unpopular US base from the island of Okinawa.

That Japan agreed to let nuclear-armed ships enter its ports and moors created in the uncertain years ago with the declassification of American documents, both disputed and rejected by conservative Japanese governments since the 1960s, sometimes setting off protests.

But in a notice where memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki drive a fierce aversion to nuclear weapons, a formal admission of the secret agreements would be a stunning reversal, and rather than previous governments unsuccessfully hid to the public.

"The Foreign Ministry repeatedly denied their existence, even in statements before Parliament," lawmaker Mosco Tanaka said.

Historical accounts show that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who died in office in 1980, considered going public on the secret pacts, but was advised against it by his aides as politically too dangerous.

Only a few Foreign Ministry bureaucrats have spoken out in recent years.

In 1965 Nov. 15, 1965 photo, US President Richard Nixon (right) welcomes Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato before holding talks concerning the return of Okinawa to Japanese control. AP

One, Kensuke Togo, said he and other high-ranking officials kept quiet for fear that disclosure of the agreements would trigger riots and perhaps topple the prime minister.

"The political costs were too great," Togo told the AP.

Even after American officials acknowledged the pacts in the 1990s, leaders of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) persistently denied them, right up to Taro Aso, the last LDP prime minister before Hatoyama's Democrats took over.

"They did not exist," Aso said in a nationally televised response to a reporter's question last July.

Even the name of revered Eisaku Sato, the prime minister viewed as the architect of Japan's postwar pacifism and resistance to nuclear weapons, has been thrust into the debate.

Three months ago, Sato's son revealed a document he found in Sato's desk after his death in 1975 and which he kept hidden.

The 1969 document, signed by Sato and President Richard Nixon, showed they agreed that US-occupied Okinawa would be returned to Japan, but the US would retain the right to have nuclear weapons on the island if the necessity arose. The agreement on Okinawa was a key part of the secret pacts that also covered US warships entering Japanese ports.

The deal with Nixon was a clear violation of Sato's pledge that Japan would not make, own or allow the entry of nuclear weapons. Sato won the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize in large part for pushing those principles.

According to Japanese media accounts, the hush-off clues him to train of treasure. AP

DUE TO SEX-SPECIFIC ABORTIONS

24M Chinese men face lonely future

BEIJING—MORE THAN 24 million Chinese men of marrying age could find themselves single in 2020, state media reported Monday, citing sex-specific abortions as a major contributing factor.

The study by the government-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences named the gender imbalance as one of China's most serious demographic problems for the country's population of 1.3 billion, the Global Times said.

"Sex-specific abortions remained extremely commonplace, especially in rural areas," where the cultural preference for boys over girls is strongest, the study said while noting the reasons for the gender imbalance were "complex." Researcher Wang Guangzhou said the skewed birth rate could lead to difficulties for men with lower incomes in finding spouses, as well as a widening age gap between partners.

Another researcher quoted by the newspaper, Peng Xizhong, said men in poorer parts of China would be forced to accept marriages late in life or remain single forever, which could "cause a break in family lines." "The chance of getting married will be slim if a man is more than 40 years old in the countryside. They will be more dependent on social security as they age and have lower household resources to rely on," Peng said.

The paper said abductions and trafficking of women were "rampant" in many with cases numbers of men, citing the National Population and Family Planning Commission.

Illegal marriages and forced prostitution were also problems in those areas, it said.

Authorities put the normal male-female ratio at between 103-107 males for every 100 females. In 2005, the last year for which data were made available, there were 119 boys for every 100 girls, the report said.

China first implemented its "one-child" population control policy in 1979.

Researchers said the gender imbalance problem ramped up in the late 1980s when women were first commonly able to find out the sex of their fetuses, leading to an increased number of sex-selective abortions. AFP

CHAI Kim Fong, 75, prays in the Malaysian Chinese Association Party Building after the Metro Tabernacle church was torched on Jan. 10. REUTERS

Another Malaysia church attacked amid 'Allah' row

KUALA LUMPUR—A MALAYSIAN church was attacked with Molotov bomb, officials said, the latest targeted by attention on a dispute over the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims disputed.

The Malang Sidi Barnes Church in the central state of Negri Sembilan in the latest to be the incendiary vandalism in a spate of violence that began last Friday sending tensions soaring in the Muslim-majority nation.

"This morning, I was alerted by a church member who saw the door of the church had been burnt," senior police Kdly Mersuni Yusk told AFP.

Deputy state police Chief Abdul Manan Mohamad Hassan confirmed the attack.

Shah said the church has some 400 members, mostly from the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo island, who conduct their service in the national language, Malay.

"We have been using the word 'Allah' during the service to treat our church members speak the Malay language," he said.

The dispute erupted two weeks ago when the High Court ruled in favor of the Catholic newspaper The Herald, which argued for the right to use "Allah" as a translation for "God" in its Malay-language version.

The government insists the word should be used only by Muslims. The ruling in the newspaper's favor was suspended last week pending an appeal, after the government argued the decision could cause racial conflict.

Despite the series of attacks, thousands of Malaysian Christians came out for weekly services Sunday.

About 10 percent of Malaysia's 27 million people are Christians, including some 850,000 Catholics. AFP

Jurist Josipovic wins Croatia presidential vote

ZAGREB—OPPOSITION SOcial Democrat Ivo Josipovic convincingly won Sunday's Croatian presidential election, promising to help the government's efforts to complete Europe Union membership talks and join the bloc in 2013.

Josipovic, a law expert and classical music composer who is relatively unknown in politics, won 60.5 percent of the vote in the second round runoff, the state electoral commission said early Monday.

He will be Croatia's third president since independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Populist Zagreb mayor Milan Bandic, backed by the Roman Catholic church and most conservative voters, took 39.7 percent of the vote in an independent candidacy. He won re-elected from the Social Democrats for insisting on running for president against the party's will.

Josipovic promised to back Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor's drive to implement reforms and fight widespread corruption, as required by Brussels to complete EU accession talks this year.

"I went an uncompromising fight against corruption and organized crime. That is what I promised, that is what we'll achieve," Josipovic said, to the cheers of his supporters.

"I strongly believe that we will wont a better Croatia with more justice, that we want a country where work is paid for and crime is punished," he said.

The confidents of the ruling conservative HDZ party failed to make it to the runoff, but Kosor, who took over in July and kick-started the new anti-corruption drive, remains the country's most popular politician.

"I believe Josipovic will support the government's efforts and that we'll cooperate well for the well-being of all our citizens," Kosor said on Monday.

The HDZ last week expelled Kosor's predecessor, Ivo Sanader, after he announced a political comeback with a stinging attack on the party leadership and the government. Kosor later said she felt stronger than ever and determined to press on with reforms. REUTERS

JOSIPOVIC

ARPUTHAM

Indian rights advocate named Reader's Digest Asian of the Year

AFTER MUCH DELIBERATION AND serious consideration, the fourth annual Reader's Digest Asian of the Year award for 2010 has been awarded to India's Jockin Arputham, who has devoted his life to campaigning for the rights of slum dwellers, improving the lives of thousands of families and other people from more than 30 other countries.

For more than seven months, the editors of Reader's Digest Asian editions compared and discussed worthy candidates.

"We look for a person who embodies the best contemporary expression of Asian values, as well as those of Reader's Digest, and who is working to shape the future of Asia in a positive manner," says Dora Chook, Editor of Reader's Digest Asia.

"We don't exclude the famous, but build diversity is a higher standard. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things' remains to be our fundamental theme," she continues.

Jockin Arputham will receive his award of $5,000 honorarium at a special ceremony in February.

The editors also mentioned five other people for honorable mentions including Singapore's Bridget Lewis who campaigns for the rights of Singapore's foreign workers and Thailand's Sanghee Chaiker, who works tirelessly to ensure that Thailand's elephant population doesn't reach dangerously low levels.

The other three nominees up were:

- Indian Arvind Kejriwal—a campaigner for the Right to Information, trying to put a stop to government bribes in India.
- Pakistani Abdul Sattar Edhi—Humanitarian for the poor and suffering, supervising the country's largest charitable network.
- China's Yang Mei-Lin who helps Cambodian refugees rebuild their lives.

Jockin Arputham takes over the title of Reader's Digest Asian of the year from actor and director Jet Li in 2009, recognized for his work on the film Bodyguards. Previous winners have been Thailand's Krisana Kraisintu for her work with HIV and malaria in 2008 and Nepalese eye surgeon Dr. Sanduk Ruit in 2007.

UAE ruling family member acquitted in torture-rape trial

AL-AIN, UNITED ARAB Emirates—A member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family was found innocent on Sunday of the torture and rape of an Afghan in a case that embarrassed the Gulf desk emirate and raised questions over human rights.

The judge reading the verdict at a court in the United Arab Emirates, the world's third largest oil exporter and a US ally, did not give a reason why Sheikh Issa bin Zayed al-Nahyan was exonerated of responsibility for abuse shown in a video that made public on US network ABC last year.

ABC identified one of the people taking part in the abuse as Sheikh Issa.

But a lawyer for the sheikh, a son of UAE founder Sheikh Zayed, said his client was found to have "diminished liability".

Sentence was former business executive had dragged him then taken the video to cover money from him.

The two men, Lebanese-American brothers Bassam and Ghassan Halabi, were sentenced to five years in absentia and fined 150,000 dirhams ($41,721) for what the judge said was dragging, recording and publishing a video and blackmail.

The judge said the reasoning behind the verdicts would be published at a later date.

Sheikh Issa listed his lawyer on the bond after sentencing was announced but made no comment.

The lawyer, Habib al-Mulla, said the UAE had demonstrated its commitment to the rule of law. "The fact that this case is taking place is a sign that the UAE is showing you that everyone in this country can be put in front of law and judged," he said.

Mohammed Shahpoon, the Afghan grain trader abused in the video, showed no reaction when the verdicts were read out.

In the footage, which dates back to 2008, Shahpoon is seen

SHEIKH Issa

struck with an electric static prod, beaten with whips and a plank of wood with a nail in it, and driven over by a car at a desert location near the coast of Abu Dhabi.

The incident was an embarrassment to the UAE at a time when it was trying to improve its rights image after international criticism over treatment of blue-collar workers and took US approval for a civilian nuclear energy pro-gram. Reuters

The WORLD

Editor Lorraine B. Gonzalo

Families of disappeared accuse Russia of dirty war

ST. PETERSBURG: St. Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Jan. 10. The region's temperature on Sunday dropped to -20 degrees C. AP

NAZRAN, RUSSIA—ALISKHAN PLIYEV WAS TALKING ON HIS CELL phone with his girlfriend one autumn afternoon when two dozen masked men in uniforms stormed into his family's house, grabbed him and began to hustle him away.

The 30-year-old construction worker's three sisters screamed, demanding to know where the intruders were taking him. "Your son is a criminal," a man in a black mask shouted, before Pliyev was driven off in a convoy of cars and vans escorted by an armored personnel carrier. He hasn't been seen since.

Officials here in the Russian region of Ingushetia say they don't know anything about Pliyev's abduction, one of scores in recent months that have caused fresh outrage and grief in a region already scarred by over 15 years of fighting.

But the young man's kidnapping is the successor of Ingushetia's lengthy list: bear the hallmarks of what rights activists call Russia's "policy of state terror"—a shadow war against violent Muslim separatists in the North Caucasus, a struggle crossing Europe and Asia.

A created tactic in the war, activists say, is forced disappearances—the brazen snatching of young people from their homes or off the street, often by gangs of masked men who never freely, even in areas heavily patrolled by Russian security and police. The number of forced disappearances has doubled in the past year, following a spike in militant attacks on police and authorities, including suicide bombings, ambushes and assassinations.

The bodies sometimes are brutally interrogated and tortured. Some turn up dead, their bodies bearing the marks of torture. Other families face the anguish of never knowing the fate of a father, brother or son.

But critics say the kidnappings have aggravated rather than reduced tensions along Russia's southern border.

Some analysts note that, after five years of relative calm, anger over the latest rash of kidnappings could inspire a fresh wave of terror attacks in Russia, a country that supplies the world with much of its oil and gas and has one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals.

Rhamzankhan Muhkhayev, 62, a retired Soviet construction manager, says more than 20 masked soldiers in unmarked vanburst into his family's red brick home in the quiet Ingush village of Ekazhevskaya at 4 a.m. in late October.

They smeared straight to a third-floor bedroom, savagely beat one son, Bengalty, and dragged off his older brother, Musa, a 27-year-old factory worker. Muhkhayev hasn't been seen since. AP

CANNES LIONS 2010 NOW OPEN FOR DELEGATE REGISTRATIONS

PRICES FROZEN FOR 2010

Delegates wishing to attend the 57th International Advertising Festival, to be held in Cannes from 20-26 June 2010, can register online at www.canneslions.com starting January 7.

Prices for all delegate packages, as well as for all entry categories, will remain at the same level of 2009 prices.

Delegates can select a 3-Day, 4-Day or Full Registration package, providing access to over 50 topical seminars, 25 educative workshops, screenings, exhibitions, four award ceremonies, two galas and the greatest networking opportunity the advertising industry has to offer.

From this year delegates can also add a guest to their 3 Day, 4 Day or Full Registration package, allowing their companion to enjoy the award ceremonies and galas with them.

Special Young Lion 4 Day and Full Registration packages are also available for young creatives (26 years or under) and young marketers (30 years or under). A student registration is offered to those enrolled in full-time education.

Registered delegates can benefit from reduced accommodation rates at a wide range of hotels, residences, serviced apartments and villas.

Along with learning, inspiration and celebration, networking is a huge part of the Cannes experience. The launch this year of Cannes Connect, an online networking tool, will aid delegates to get in touch with other delegates before arriving in Cannes, facilitating meeting up with other like-minded people during the Festival.

NEW: A Young Marketers Competition will launch this year to sit alongside the Cannes Young Lions competitions in Cyber, Media, Film and Press. Competing teams will have 24 hours to create the perfect brief and present it to a panel of world-leading creatives and strategists who will judge their efforts. In the same way that the Cannes Young Lions creative competitions have encouraged and raised the bar for young agency talent around the world, the aim of the Young Marketers Competition is to do the same for clients.

"Cannes Lions is a unique insightful and learning experience, a celebration of the best global creativity and the industry's networking capital. To facilitate attending this unmissable annual event during the current economic climate, we are keeping the prices at last year's level which, coupled with all the other delegate enhancements, we are sure will be very much welcomed by the industry," said Philip Thomas, Festival CEO.

For further information and to register to attend the 57th Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival, please go to www.canneslions.com

Entries open online Thursday 28th of January.

The International Advertising Festival - Cannes Lions - is the largest gathering of worldwide advertising professionals and advertisers as well as the most prestigious annual advertising awards. More than 10,000 registered delegates from 90 countries and around 12,000 total visitors from the advertising and allied industries attend this event to celebrate the best of creativity across all media mix, discuss industry issues and network with one another. Over 28,000 ads from all over the world are showcased and judged at the Festival. Winning companies receive the highly coveted Lion trophy, honoring the most creative TV/cinema, print, outdoor, interactive, radio, design, sales promotion, integrated advertising, as well as the best media and direct marketing solutions. A unique program of high-profile seminars, workshops and keynote speakers are also presented by some of the biggest names in the industry.

For further information about the entry changes and to register to attend the Festival, please go to www.canneslions.com. The Philippine Daily Inquirer is the Official Country Representative of the Cannes Lions Festival. You may also direct your queries through our Corporate Affairs office at (632) 897 8000 local 209.

Official Festival Representative

Shamed wife of N. Ireland leader undergoing psychiatric treatment

ROBINSON

BELFAST—THE DISGRACED POLitician wife of Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson is undergoing intensive psychiatric treatment as her husband's former lover begs in the balance, he said late Sunday.

Iris Robinson is being treated after everywhere she had an affair with a lover 40 years her junior and accused 50,000 pounds ($80,000) from two wealthy developers to help them set up a restaurant.

She is quitting her seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Britain's House of Commons, and pressure is mounting on Robinson husband to resign over allegations about how much he knew about his wife's financial dealings.

Robinson, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), moved to quash speculation about his 26-year-old lover's whereabouts, saying: "Iris is receiving acute psychiatric treatment from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust." His wife has been suffering from severe depression.

Her former lover, Kirk McCambley, now 21, has refused to comment on the allegations.

Robinson has vowed to clear his name, but one of his predecessors as leader of the semi-autonomous British province said Sunday his position was becoming untenable.

David Trimble, who jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 for his efforts to bring stability to Northern Ireland after three decades of violence, predicted in a BBC interview that Robinson would quit in the "next few days." AFP

Review of Texas rampage finds doctors ignored worries over Hasan

HASAN

HUNTSVILLE—A DEFENSE DEpartment review of the shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, has found the doctors overseeing Maj. Nidal Hasan's medical training repeatedly raised serious new his strident views on Islam and his inappropriate behavior, yet continued to give him positive performance evaluations that kept him moving through the ranks.

The picture emerging from the review ordered by Defense Secretary Robert Gates is one of supervisors who failed to heed their own warnings about an officer ill-suited to be an Army psychiatrist, according to information examined by investigators considering the study.

Hasan, 39, is accused of murdering 13 people on Nov. 5 at Fort Hood, the worst killing spree on a US military base.

What remains unclear is why Hasan could be advanced in spite of all the worries over his competence. That is likely to be the subject of a more detailed accounting by the department. Recent statistics show the Army easily blocks junior officers from promotion, especially in the medical corps.

Hasan showed no signs of being ejected as a result of the problems that arose between the armed Islamic scholar and those preceding the thwarted Christmas attempt to blow up a Detroit-bound US airliner. President Barack Obama and his top national security aides have acknowledged they had intelligence about the alleged bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, but failed to connect the dots.

Hasan was charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted premeditated murder for evasion at a San Antonio military hospital, undergoing rehabilitation for paralysis stemming from gunshot wounds suffered when security guards fired back during the massacre. Authorities have not said whether they plan to seek the death penalty.

After the Fort Hood shooting, Gates appointed two former senior defense officials to examine the procedures and policies for identifying threats within the military services. The review, led by former Army Secretary Togo West and retired Navy Adm. Vernon Clark, began Nov. 20 and is to be delivered to Gates by Jan. 15. AP

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IN THIS ISSUE

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Gov't to tap euro bond market in February

Funds to settle maturing debts, cover budget gap

By Michelle V. Remo and Konrad W. Dorotan

AFTER RAISING $1.5 BILLION FROM A BOND sale last week, the national government will again tap the international capital market next month by floating as much as one billion euros to settle its maturing euro-denominated obligations.

Roberto Tumbiolo Diaz, executive vice president of First Metro Investment Corp., said yesterday that the government might sell anywhere between 500 million and one billion euros worth of global bonds to finance about 608 million euros of obligations that will fall due in February.

FMIC, which served as underwriter for some government bond issues in the past, may be tapped again for the planned bond sale in February.

"Government bond issues this year may be the same as last year's," Diaz said in a briefing on FMIC's economic and market outlook for 2010. He said the government's bond commercial borrowing requirement for this year would likely be the same as or close to the $3.35 billion in 2009.

Besides financing its maturing loans, the government needs to borrow to cover a yawning budget deficit.

FMIC expects the budget gap to settle a little below P300 billion this year, or 3.3 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Meantime, the government is also looking at undertaking a $500-million yen-denominated bonds through private placements in Manila and Tokyo get close to signing a deal.

"A private placement is advantageous in that it can be done more quickly because you are dealing with institutional buyers," National Treasurer

(story's in B2)

NTC to push lower interconnection fees

By Paolo G. Montecillo

THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS Commission is continuing to push to lower the cost of mobile services in the country despite ongoing opposition from local network operators on all fronts.

The regulator said that as soon as the issues on the new per-pulse charging scheme are resolved, one of the first policies it would pursue is the lowering of access charges on mobile phone services.

"That is part of the NTC's program to lowering voice call and text costs. We already have that on the drawing board," NTC Deputy Commissioner Douglas Michael Maffiliu said.

Access charges, also called interconnection costs, are what subscribers pay when making a call or sending a text message to another network. As its name suggests, these charges are meant to cover the costs involved in interconnecting with another network.

"Lowering access charges will directly lower voice call and text costs for subscribers," Maffiliu said.

Last year, two draft circulars obtained by the Inquirer showed the NTC's plans to cut interconnection charges gradually, instead of the one-time cut the regulator proposed in 2006.

The 2008 rule was quickly shot down by industry players.

While short messaging service (SMS) and voice call costs within a single network have significantly gone down as a result of "bucket prices" promos offered by local firms, costs for the same services between one network to another have remained expensive.

Text messages made from one network to another are P1

(story's in B6)

MARKET AVENUE

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

P45.80 = $1
As of 5 p.m., Jan. 11, 2010

¥93.33 = $1
As of 5 p.m., Jan. 11, 2010

STOCK MARKET

Stocks inch up in dull trade

ACTIVITY ON THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange continued the lackluster pattern of the previous week as investors continued to search for directions on the change, economists and commentators in the new year.

(See stock market report on Page B2)

At the end of trading yesterday, the PSE index stood at 3,987.95, a meager gain of 13.17 points or 0.33 percent from the previous trading day's level. That was, however, the PSEi's highest level since Dec. 3, 2009.

The performance of the PSEi mirrored the trend of the 30 Dow Jones Industrial Average, which has also been straightened to record trading days.

Value turnover improved slightly with P2.73 billion worth of stocks changing hands.

Gainers beat losers, 82 to 80, while 59 shares were unchanged.

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PAY LIGHT
Low Monthly Plans as low as
Vios Innova P 4,000* P 5,000*
Also available 0% interest up to 18 months for selected variants.
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TOYOTA
Going forward

More vibrant market seen

PSEi seen challenging 3,800 record posted in '07

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE STOCK MARKET INDEX IS EXpected to be more vibrant this year, with the PSEi, buoyed by the low interest environment, seen challenging the 3,800 record passed in 2007.

According to First Metro Investment Corp., the local bourse will pave further recovery with the anticipated recovery of the global and domestic economies from the recent turmoil.

"Stronger than expected recovery and low interest rates will stretch the tally of the equities market this year. We see the PSEi challenging the 3,800 mark in 2010," Eduardo Ilac-tug Jr., vice president of FMIC, said in a press conference yesterday.

Despite a tough economic climate, the Philippine Stock Exchange saw improvements in share prices last year as the domestic economy managed to outrun its recession.

The PSEi last year stood at 3,052.68, up 63 percent from 1,872.98 in 2008.

FMIC officials said the low interest rate regime would prompt investors, who stretched some out into last year amid the global turmoil, to invest more in the equities market this year.

Low interest yields on fixed-income instruments, including government securities, encourage investors to place funds in equities.

Given this, FMIC president Francisco Sebastian said listed companies could easily attain a 15 percent earnings per share.

"Although this share prices have already recovered from pre-Lehman levels, we still see them increasing further," Sebastian said in the same press conference.

Sectors that are expected to lead growth this year are power and other utilities, broadcast and mining, FMIC officials said. They said the financial sector would likely remain stable.

These projections are in line with the investment made earlier by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said liquidity in the economy would be channeled strongly this year through higher investments in the equities market. Investments in bonds will still be relatively low, but not enough to surpass the projected investments in stocks.

Analysts said the rising risk appetite of the market would benefit the stock market.

Sebastian, however, said there are risks to the projected surge in stock prices this year—such as faster inflation, which may prompt the central bank to raise interest rates, and a less-than-ideal election situation.

He said the rosy stock market forecast was hinged on the assumption that the elections would be peaceful and credible.

DFNN in talks with Macau-based firm

By Dimitri L. Lucas

PUBLICLY LISTED DFNN INC. HAS received a "wedding" offer from a Macau-based firm to invest up to $3 million in the latter's gaming operations, the firm said on Monday.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE), DFNN said Cowell Holdings Ltd. will—subject to due diligence—invest the amount in primary shares of DFNN at an agreed price of P25 per share.

According to the wedding term sheet, the primary investment in DFNN "will be used to partially fund the purchase of a call to be divested/ entered into of shares in Kinchiet Games Investments Inc. (KGI).

KGI supplies technologies and systems for use in Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp.'s (Pagcor) gaming operations.

"Under said term sheet, the parties have agreed to allow Cowell to assist in managing the operations of KGI under an appropriate management agreement," DFNN said. "Cowell's management is composed of successful and experienced technology and gaming executives from Macau."

In addition, up to $3 million more may be used to purchase DFNN secondary shares from the open market with the view of acquiring a board seat "subject to the appropriate disclosures and regulations of the PSE."

Under the deal, Cowell will have the option to invest another $7 million in shares of Double Gamma Investments (PNL), DFNN's gaming subsidiary when PNL lists on the Singapore Stock Exchange.

Cowell also committed an additional $7 million to fund the operations of KGI with respect to fully developing gaming provision and technology business.

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Handling market themes and their play

Ben Sonora

PESO TRADING opened for the first time this year last week, market participants gravitated toward third liner stocks. This caught even market-wise surprise.

One of these that surprised the market was MRC-allied Industries Inc. The share price of MRC jumped by as much as 46 centavos on Monday alone (Jan. 6) on reports that its management was involved in a new business proposition that will transform it to a company into becoming a big player in the beverage powerhouse.

In play, too, along with MRC with their respective market themes were Liberty Telecoms Holdings Inc. (LIB), Cyber Bay Corp. (CYBR) and DFNN Inc.

With renewed interest over its terrestrial telephony business, LIB shares became a target of buying interest. For the week, its share price was as much as 10 percent.

On the basis of its volume turnover and intraday price high of P4.55 recorded last Friday, LIB may have already broken out from price resistance levels that its shares may share higher this week.

One sign that this may happen is if the volume of Monday's buying will persist. It was foreign demand that largely powered its strong market performance last Friday.

CYBR had a similar experience as LIB. Shares turnover fatefully spiked higher this time as the speculative story that it will be converted into a holding company for all its private business interests of its media magnate stockholder.

Following the recent price behavior of third liner stocks, it is not farfetched to imagine that CYBR may try to challenge its 52-week high of P0.87 anytime soon.

DFNN is another similar story. Its share price surged 17.26 percent as of Friday on speculation that speculators in the trade started to buy its shares in the open market. This was because DFNN management could not just yet directly address such interest. On technical terms, DFNN may breakout beyond P3.70 in the following days, too.

On the other hand, market regulars like Ayala Land (ALI), Alliance Global Group Inc. (AGI), Ashlee Foods, First Gen Corp. (FGEN), Energy Development Corp. (EDC), First Philippine Holdings Corp. (FPH), Globe Telecom (GLO) and index mover PLDT also added to market momentum.

Market activity on these stocks started out lately strong around the story of relative low valuation on the basis of better anticipated earnings for the year. However, with the real status and progress of the 321 economic recovery and the overall view still looking detailed up to last week, the prospects of long-term positioning already faded. Market trading became more and more selective toward the end of the week.

Stock play on wrong story

One stock whose market theme is fair growth but is unfortunately set to play on a wrong story—especially recently is Alliance Tuna International Inc. (TUNA).

Recent market advisory sweeps the closure of the western portion of the Pacific Ocean to purse seine fishing for one-month starting Jan. 1, 2005, as advised to TUNA for it was feared that this may curtail its supply requirement and eventually affect its continued growth.

In talks with TUNA, it was clarified that what is badly affected by the decision of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is the fresh fish catch that fishing operations like the ones here... as read in the news papers—of the locally-based operation of Fishing and Allied Industries (ATNG) supply to wet markets. On the whole, it's Japan—with its "sashimi" market—that will bear the brunt of the consequences of the decision, TUNA emphasized.

The fish supply of TUNA largely comes from frozen sources and not from fresh catch. Only less than 10 percent of its supply comes from fresh catch, according to TUNA, such shortfall should be easily covered by its Indonesia operation save that the full impact of its operation will be felt after becoming operational only on the second half of last year.

In summary, TUNA will continue with its fair growth, not to mention the impact of its plans to put its New Zealand operation on stream already this year.

Bottom line spin

The above mentioned stocks will certainly play on the basis of their identified market themes. In the end, however, the fundamentals prevailing over the operation of the company of said stocks will determine just how good their stock price will perform in the market. No amount of manipulation will sustain their price performance in the market in the long run.

These require knowledge on the science of stock investing and trading, and a touch in trading market psychology. As to which of the two is more important, Albert Einstein gives the inspiration. When confronted with a similar question between knowledge and imagination, he said the latter is better. However, this should not mean that the exercise of your effort to be in the know only goes upto the more art of selecting market type.

You may reach the Market Rider at marketrider@inquirer.com.ph or directly at benromansora@yahoo.com

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Magic trek

NO LONGER RUNNING FOR PUB lic office this May, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves included from recently.

He challenged some congressmen in a heart duel in the Executive Court, as he blasted for his P13-billion pet project—the "magic" stamp on cigarettes and liquor.

The project was an unsolicited proposal from Swiss firm Sicpa Product Security AG to affix the "magic" stamp on local cigarettes.

Bilibaso mashrado, the Department of Finance went on a tough trek to get this sure administration of Chavacha behind the unsolicited proposal.

The DOF endorsed the proposal to the Bureau of Internal Revenue, in which three successive commissioners were sold, although all of them resigned eventually.

From what I heard, the BIR is sure ready to put the Swiss firm's proposal under a "time-challenge."

That means that the BIR wants to see how to accept the Sicpa proposal. It just needs implementing rules to bear Sicpa on the contract.

If some issues forward to do so, implementation shortly—for sure, the Sicpa proposal it a go—as done deal.

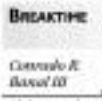
Now, after a public hearing on the "magic" stamp issue, the House ways and means committee report on that the DOF needed congressional approval for it.

The panel, according to the committee, was in effort reunion, and only the House can change anything and everything in taxation.

And so, Teves told the committee all, saying Congress had nothing to do with it, for the issue was one it could just bring the issue to the Supreme Court.

It is hard to say why, with five months in this core administration of Chavacha, Teves went into a congressional struggle who decided on the DOF budget.

Teves recently held a meeting of BIR officers that he would no longer accept public office in May. Well, he



BREAKTIME

Consuelo A. Bautista

said he wanted to focus on the pressing budget deficit.

And so his favorite hobby a DOF consultant known as "BC" told the audience in the morning. "El presidiyal succession fears." What a time!

* * *

BASED on the Sicpa proposal, the "magic" stamp project should cost this country only about P13 billion, a good part of which should go to programmed Sicpa.

And what do we get in return? Well, the benefits are still a bit hazy.

For one, Sicpa executives admitted in congressional hearings that, in effect, the Swiss company just plucked figures from the air to support the "magic" stamp project.

Anyway, the biggest mystery remains the enduring support of Teves and sidekick "BC" for the P13-billion project.

In August which, according to the House ways and means committee, was basically wishful—would have to dissolved by the next administration.

And so why would Teves and company now just leave a cup to Noynoy ... err, to whoever becomes the next president.

On that point, former Economic Planning Secretary Ralph Recto, who also headed the Bindu, gave some words of wisdom to Teves.

He said the Bindu must step up proval of big-ticket projects (i.e. the "magic" stamp) at this time because of the proximity of the elections.

Or else, people would think this whole administration was fast-tracking some midnight deals.

By the way, when Bindu was Nido chief, the authority threw the Sicpa proposal out of the window.

Teves and company salvaged it after Recto resigned. All of a sudden, the Bindu gave the BIR instructions to negotiate with Sicpa.

And are all those other "negotiations" really neutral.

* * *

ACCORDING to Sicpa, the "magic" stamp project should raise the BIR collection of excise taxes on cigarettes, liquor and beverages. Yes, including soft drinks!

Sicpa would simply sell to the BIR the "magic" stamps, the manufacturers would attach them on each and every piece of millions of product items, and the BIR checks the some millions of products for the genuine Sicpa stuff with hi-tech gadgets.

For the "magic" stamps, Sicpa would charge as some P1.3 billion in 10 years, which would have to be shouldered by the local cigarette and liquor companies.

The BIR would also act as tax collection agent, since it would be the BIR that should get the payment from the companies for installment in Sicpa.

The question now whether or not the BIR could do that legally. No wonder, Teves and sidekick need for a legislative fix on the issue.

In the United States, only one state government (California) bought the Sicpa "magic" stamps.

And what came out of the California experiment?

Well, according to official reports from the US, which are available to the public, the Sicpa "magic" stamp system did not increase the collection of excise taxes in California, as its proponent promised to do.

At the same time, according to those reports, it cost the state government and consumers several millions of dollars.

Based on the California experiment, the Sicpa "magic" stamp project requires startup-affixing machines. Each one costs about P7 million. How many do we need?

More importantly to make the system work, the BIR for its part must acquire scanning devices. Each one costs about P40,000. Now, how many does the BIR need to check on the cigarette packs and liquor bottles that are sold every minute in the archipelago of more than 7,000 islands?

Gov't to tap ...

From page B1

Roberto S. Tan said in an interview yesterday.

Each buyers "have international research coverage and, in terms of documentary requirements, a private placement becomes less stringent compared to a public offering," Tan added.

Still, Tan said that while the Bureau of the Treasury was ready to support a public placement if "the pricing parameters are settled," he said a public offer was still part of the government's options.

Tan said the government and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation have not yet secured the final go-ahead from both sides and that, with the looked paper-work still to be completed, the so-called interim bonds was not likely to happen this January.

"We are not in a hurry," he said. "We want to do this at affordable as we can."

The National Treasurer said that while the government earlier signed with JBIC an agreement for a guarantee on an issuance of up to $1 billion, the planned float would be issued in base ($500 million).

Stocks ...

From page B1

Almost all sectoral indices edged higher, led by the holding firms index, which rose by 1 percent.

Energy Development Corp. remained to be the most active stock with trades in the Lopez-controlled firm accounting for 13.6 percent of total transactions on the counter.

This was followed by Ayala Corp., which accounted for 9 percent of total transactions, while index heavyweight PLDT accounted for 4.6 percent of trades.

Activity in Ayala Consolidated Mining and Development Corp. was also relatively heavy after the firm announced development regarding its first shipment of copper concentrates for the year. Reuters L. Lucas

NTC to push lower ...

From page B1

each, while calls can soar about 90 to P7.50 a minute.

Under the proposed rules, the interconnection charge for text messages will be brought down to 20 centavos from the current 35 centavos in the first year of implementation of the new rule.

On the third and fifth year of the circular's implementation, interconnection charge for text will have to be brought down to 20 centavos and 15 centavos, respectively.

Meanwhile, the draft circular for voice calls wants to bring down the interconnection charge to P1.50 a minute from the current P4 on the first year of implementation.

The charge for voice calls will be brought down at a faster rate; the NTC Celestial said, with the interconnection fee to go to higher than P2 in the second year of implementation, and P1.50 on the third.

The NTC said that with the expiration of Smart Communications Inc., local telecommunications firm pay more than they receive from interconnection.

This means that since Smart, with its 40 million subscribers, is the biggest mobile network in the country, there is a higher likelihood those more people from other networks contact Smart subscribers. Every time this happens, Smart gets paid for allowing other networks to make its own.

VICTORIAS

NOTICE OF ANNUAL STOCKHOLDERS' MEETING

TO ALL STOCKHOLDERS:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to Section 1, Article VIII of the Amended By-Laws, the Annual Stockholders' Meeting of VICTORIAS MILLING COMPANY, INC. ("VMC") will be held on Tuesday, 02 February 2010 at 9:00 a.m. at the Park Ballroom, Century Park Sheraton Manila, 565 P. Ocampo Street, Malate, Manila.

The AGENDA of the meeting will be as follows:

1. Call to Order
2. Certification of Notice to Stockholders and Presence of Quorum
3. Approval of the Minutes of the Stockholders' Meeting held on 03 February 2009
4. Approval of Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements
5. Ratification of Acts and Proceedings of the Board of Directors and Corporate Officers
6. Amendment of By-Laws
7. Appointment of External Auditors
8. Election of Members of the Board of Directors
9. Other Matters
10. Adjournment

Minutes of the said Regular Stockholders' Meeting and resolutions of the Board of Directors on 13 January 2009 will be available for examination starting fifteen (15) days prior to the VMC Stockholders' Meeting at the Corporate Secretary's Office.

Stockholders who will not be able to or do not intend to attend the meeting in person may, at their option, designate their authorized representatives in respect of VMC shares owned by such Stockholder by filling out, signing and submitting the proxy provided at the Corporate Secretary's Office, Victorias Milling Company, Inc., Victorias Industrial Estate, Victorias, Negros Occidental, Philippines, 2nd Floor, Old Executive Building, 21 Mabini corner Fabrica Streets, Poblacion, Victorias, Negros Occidental or e-mailed to corporate.secretary@victorias.com.ph not later than 28 January 2010 at the latest.

Only Stockholders of Record as of 15 January 2010 will be entitled to vote at the meeting.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE CORPORATION IS NOT SOLICITING PROXIES.

(Sgd.) SANTIAGO T. GABIONZA, JR.
Corporate Secretary

PSALM

INVITATION TO BID

The Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation (PSALM), Privatization, Bids and Awards Committee (the "Committee") invites interested parties to participate in and bid for the privatization of the following:

The 246 MW Angat Hydroelectric Power Plant
located in Norzagaray, Bulacan

(the "Asset"). The bidding/pre-qualification process is a "as is, where is" basis.

Interested parties must submit a Letter of Interest ("LOI") to the Committee, which shall state the full name, address, telephone and fax numbers of the interested party, name of the principal contact, and signed by an authorized representative, on or the most be received by the Committee at the PSALM Office (6th Storey, Executive Building Center, 124 Paseo de Roxas corner Gamboa Streets, Makati City, not later than 5:00 p.m. on 21 January 2010 (the "LOI Submission Deadline"). Only interested parties that submit an LOI by the LOI Submission Deadline shall be allowed to participate further in the privatization of the Asset.

All a prerequisite to the receipt of the Bidding Package, interested parties shall execute a Confidentiality Agreement and an Undertaking pursuant to Section 76 of RA 9136, both in the forms provided by PSALM, and pay a non-refundable fee in the amount of Two Thousand Five Hundred (US Dollars (U.S.$ 2,500.00) (the "Participation Fee"). The Participation Fee shall be either in cash, manager's check, or cashier's check, all bank drawings, if any, shall be for the account of the interested party. The Confidentiality Agreement, Undertaking, and Participation Fee must be received by the Committee on or before 5:00 p.m. on 28 January 2010, to entitle an interested party to further participation in the privatization of the Asset.

The Bidding Package, which includes the Bidding Procedures, shall be issued during office hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) from 01 February to 12 February 2010 (the "Deadline") at the PSALM Office. Only interested parties or consortium (as described below) which have been issued the Bidding Package by the Deadline will be allowed to participate further in the privatization of the Asset.

An interested party shall submit the LOI, if it intends to participate in the privatization process, submit a bid, and enter into the pertinent agreements. Once an interested party submits the Confidentiality Agreement and Undertaking and pays the Participation Fee, such interested party may no longer be ineligible from the privatization process, except through a consortium in accordance with the terms and conditions in the Bidding Procedures, among the requirements of which are: (i) such interested party must own at least a majority of the shares outstanding and entitled to vote in such consortium; (ii) the consortium must be a juridical entity; and (iii) a letter requesting to bid through consortium must be submitted to the Committee on or before the deadline set for the submission the Bidding Procedures.

The schedule of the bidding activities is as follows:

Issue Bidding Documents	12 January 2010 until 5:00 p.m. (last day) at the Bid Submission Deadline
Pre-Bid Conference	27 February 2010, 2:00 p.m. at the PSALM Office
Bid Submission Deadline	29 April 2010

Reference to time in the above and below shall be Manila time. Should any of the above dates fall on a holiday, the deadline shall be extended to the same time of the immediately succeeding business day in Makati City.

Every prospective Bidding partner shall be required to submit a Bid security in the form of a Bid security declaration or in cash, manager's check, or cashier's check, or a bank guarantee, or a surety bond callable on demand, or any combination of these, in favor of PSALM, which must be acceptable to the Committee. The bid security of the winning bidder shall be automatically converted into security for guarantee, compliance, faithful, and complete performance of the obligations under the transaction. The details of the privatization of the Asset are contained in the Bidding Package.

An interested party or bidder, Confidentiality Agreements, and Undertakings shall be addressed and submitted to: The Chairperson, Privatization, Bids and Awards Committee, PSALM Corporation, 2nd Floor, Executive Building, 6780 Ayala Avenue, Makati City, Philippines. Inquiries and clarifications shall be addressed to Atty. Clarence D. Tolentino of the PSALM Office, at telefax number (632) 890-4929 or e-mail address cdtolentino@psalm.gov.ph.

The Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any interested party or bidder or proposals or bids therefore, or any part thereof, and/or to waive any defects contained therein and accept the offer advantageous to the Government, without offering any reason whatsoever. It does not assume any obligation to compensate or indemnify parties for any expense or loss that they may incur as a result of their participation in the privatization process, and/or any activities that are preparatory thereto. Finally, it reserves the right to modify, supplement or change the Bidding Procedures and other aspects of the privatization process at any time, including the schedule and the minor procedural terms, for any reason whatsoever and without giving advance notice to the parties and/or bidders shall be notified subsequently of such modifications, supplements or changes.

PSALM BAC Chairperson, Bids and Awards Committee

NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY

Invitation to Apply for Eligibility and to Bid/Expression of Interest

Procurement of NFA Yearling Services

Project Reference No. 2010-NFA07-NFA01-001

BUSINESS

Treasury reports rise of T-bill rates

Market players deployed their liquid holdings, says exec

By Kennel 'N' Dacuyan

THE YIELD OF THE BENCHMARK 91-day Treasury bill went up by 2.7 basis points in an average of 1.914 percent as investor rates raise across the board in this year's first T-bill auction.

Interest on the 182-day bills went up by 2.4 basis points while that for the 364-day issue went up by 2 basis points.

The six-month debt paper now eases the government's average of 4.129 percent while the year-long issue eases 4.562 percent.

National Treasurer Roberto B. Tan said yesterday's volume of tenders were "very substantial."

"All the offers were oversubscribed," Tan said. "Market players are deploying their liquid holdings."

He added that yesterday's auction showed a sideways move, meaning that the rise in the yield was insignificant, and that all were within the range of of close deals at the secondary market.

In yesterday's auction, investors tendered a total of P120.39 billion, almost three times the total offer of P43.58 billion.

For the 91-day T-bill, buyers tendered a total of P6.65 billion, or more than three times the treasury's offer of P2 billion.

They also tendered a total of P9.19 billion, or more than thrice the P3 billion offer for the 182-day bill.

Also, market players pitched a total of P7.58 billion, or more than twice the P3.5 billion worth of 364-day bills on offer.

For the first quarter of 2015, the BTr plans to issue a total of P110.5 billion in debt paper—a third of which would be in T-bills.

The amount is almost double the P65 billion borrowing program for the previous quarter, which the BTr covered mainly with long-term T-bonds.

According to the BTr, it is scheduled to offer in six auctions a total of P22 billion in 91-day bills, P10 billion in 182-day bills and P31 billion in 364-day bills.

TAN

Investors sought for 246-MW Angat plant

By Amy R. Remo

VINCI-RUN POWER SECTOR Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. is seeking investors interested in acquiring the 246-megawatt (MW) Angat hydroelectric power plant complex in Norzagaray, Bulacan.

According to PSALM holding documents, the hydropower facility is being privatized on an "as is, where is" basis.

Only those prospective who will submit letters of interest to PSALM on or before Jan. 27, will be allowed to participate.

Interested parties must execute a confidentiality agreement, as well as pay a non-refundable participation fee of P2,500.00, Inc. 12%.

The bidding package will be issued by PSALM between Feb. 9 to Feb. 12.

Investors may undertake due diligence for the facility beginning Jan. 13 until a week before the bid submission deadline, which has been slated on April 6th next year, PSALM said.

The bid conference has been set on Feb. 17.

The Angat hydropower plant began commercial operation in July 1967. It has four main facilities with a combined capacity of 200 MW, as well as five auxiliary units, which have a total capacity of 46 MW.

This year, RP may expect up to 15% rise in exports

By Michelle V. Ramos

AFTER A SEMIP SLUMP LAST year, the country's exports are expected to pick up in 2015, registering growth of between 12 and 15 percent, fueled by the anticipated recovery of the global economy that may translate to higher demand for electronics and other goods.

The projection was made by Rizal Mercio Investments Corp. and University of Asia and the Pacific (UAAP), in their month-by-publication Market Call.

Victor Abola, professor at UAAP, said in a press conference yesterday that the global economy from a crippling crisis, identified to be the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s, would mean higher demand for goods coming from the Philippines and other emerging economies.

Demand for electronics, such as computers and cellular phones will pick up, thereby boosting the country's exports earnings. Electronics exports are the country's major dollar earners, accounting for almost 5/6 percent of total export revenues.

Latest data from the National Statistics Office showed that the Philippine exports reached $11.3 billion in January to October last year, down 2.7 percent from $42.99 billion in the same period the previous year.

Analysts said the drop in exports was mainly due to sluggish demand for electronics. During a crisis, consumers tend to focus expenditures on food and other basic goods, spending less on non-essential items.

Decline in exports came where the United States and other industrialized nations—major export markets of the Philippines and other developing nations—fell into a recession.

The Philippine economy bounced for the slowdown of the Philippines' own economy. The domestic economy is projected to have grown by only 6.6 percent last year from 7.9 percent the previous year and 7.2 percent in 2007.

"Recovery area earlier than expected because of continued monetary and fiscal policies," Abola said, referring to most governments' efforts to pump prime their respective economies.

Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT
National Capital Region
DOLE NCR Building, 357 Roligaos St.,
Manila, Manila

NOTICE OF FILING OF APPLICATION/S FOR ALIEN EMPLOYMENT PERMIT/S (AEP/S)

Notice is hereby given that the following companies/employers have filed with this Regional Office applications for Alien Employment Permit/s:

Name and address of Company/Employer	Name of Foreign National/ Citizenship	Position
ALLMAYTERS GENERAL MERCHANDISING CORPORATION No. 1003 MSMV Bldg., J. Bocobo St., Malate, Manila	Ko Li Chinese	Marketing and Merchandising Analyst
LANDLINE MALL TRADING & YOUNG PHIL. INC. 6/F Nissin Kensan Bldg., 486 J. Quintos St., Binondo, Manila	Kimmy Nixon Buan Go(sic)	Operation Manager
DIRECT PHILIPPINES, INC. 2/F Princon Roces Bldg., Paseo de Roxas, Makati City	Hiroyoshi Takeshima Japanese	Project Manager
DIRECT PHILIPPINES, INC. 2/F Princon Roces Bldg., Paseo de Roxas, Makati City	Hiroyuki Shiozaki Japanese	Distribution Manager
MAKATI SHANGRI-LA HOTEL & RESORT INC. (MAKATI SHANGRI-LA MAKATI) Ayala cor. Makati Avenues, Makati City	Wee Hoe Hoong Chinese	Ultimate Executive Chef
MAKATI SHANGRI-LA HOTEL & RESORT INC. (MAKATI SHANGRI-LA MAKATI) Ayala cor. Makati Avenues, Makati City	Yoshiko Seki Japanese	Japanese Guest Relations Officer
CENTER FOR MULTICULTURAL STUDIES, INC. 6/F CCI, Room 1006 Mendiola St. Brgy. 916, CCI, Makati City	Suzanne Michelle Belgian	Academic Lecturer/ Instructor
INTERACTIVE BUSINESS NETWORK ALLIANCE, INC. 20/C/O SVP Building Corporate Tower, 2/G Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City	Nam Min Cheol Malaysian	Operation Officer
INTERACTIVE BUSINESS NETWORK ALLIANCE, INC. 20/C/O SVP Building Corporate Tower, 2/G Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City	Lai Peng Lian Malaysian	Customer Support Officer
CHINA BANKING CORP. 140 Hubay Pacific Tower, 6756 Ayala Avenue, Makati City	Michael Thomas Mccullough Jamaican	General Manager
CHINA BANKING CORP. 140 Hubay Pacific Tower, 6756 Ayala Avenue, Makati City	Jasmine Lynn Fraga Jamaican	Operation Manager
UNIVERSAL ELECTRIC POWER CORPORATION 14/F Makati Sky Plaza Bldg., 6788 Ayala Avenue, Makati City	Rey Jallo Edmundo Laguesma	Chairman of the Board/ E. Treasurer
PACIFIC HEALTHCARE (PHILIPPINES) INC. Penthouse Prince Bldg., 31 Rada Street, Legaspi Village, Makati City	Philip Mark Reed British	General Manager
HERMANO STAR TOUR PLANNERS INC. No. 1002 J. Bocobo St., Malate, Manila	Ho Ngging Wa Chinese	Tour Coordinator
TRAVELLERS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL GROUP INC. 6/F Star Cruises Centre, 100 Andrews Avenue, Newport City, Pasay City	Ngo Duy Minh Vietnamese	Chef de Cuisine / F & B Worker
ITS PHILIPPINES, INC. 10/F Petron Megaplaza Bldg., 358 Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City	Ying Chen Chinese	Product Manager
TRAVELLERS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL GROUP INC. 6/F Star Cruises Centre, 100 Andrews Avenue, Newport City, Pasay City	Mutsuhisa Oshima Japanese	Chef-Assistant Vice President - Kitchen Management
PMS - SHIPBOARD SYSTEMS INC. 2/F CCI-IV Medical Plaza Chicago Bldg., San Miguel Avenue, Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Sung Ju Cho Korean	Manager
SKY ENGLISH LEARNING CENTER INC. 2/F SKY Pacific Avenue, Quezon City	Wanmonlang Wei Mizoram	General Manager

If you have any information/objection to the above-mentioned applications please communicate with the Regional Director.

SALVADOR G. AGRUPIS
DEC, Regional Director

(PIA January 12, 2015)

Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Manila

INVITATION TO BID

The Supreme Court, through the General Appropriations Act of 2015, intends to apply for payment of the Four Million Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱4,500,000.00) being the Government Share for the Procurement of Lubricants and Other Oil Products for the use of the Vehicles for CY 2015 and CY 2016, and (2) Five Million Four Hundred Eighty Thousand Pesos (₱5,480,000.00) being the Government Share for the Procurement of Motor Vehicle Tires for the Supreme Court for the Comprehensive Health Care Package of the Supreme Court for CY 2015, both amounts to cover the Fiscal Year 2015 under the Regular Agency Fund, Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE).

The Supreme Court, now invites bids for the Procurement of Fuel, Lubricants and Other Oil Products for the use of the Vehicles for CY 2015 and 2016 and for the Comprehensive Health Care Package of the Supreme Court for CY 2015. Bidders should have completed, within the period of three (3) years from the date of submission and receipt of bids, contracts similar to the Project. The description of an eligible contract is completion of the following: Procurement of Fuel, Lubricants and Other Oil Products.

Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures pursuant to Republic Act (RA) 9184, otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act, Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of RA 9184, otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act, Rules, otherwise known as the Implementing Rules for the Bidding Documents not later than the submission of bid bids.

The Supreme Court will hold the Pre-Bid Conference on January 16, 2015, 10:00 Conference Room 2, 2/F Supreme Court Old Building, Taft Ave., Manila at (1) Five Million Four Hundred Eighty Thousand Pesos (₱5,480,000.00) for the Procurement of Fuel, Lubricants and Other Oil Products for the Use of the Vehicles for CY 2015 and 2016; and (2) ₱4,500,000.00 for the Comprehensive Health Care Package of the Supreme Court for CY 2015, which shall be open only to all interested parties who have purchased the Bidding Documents.

Bids must be delivered to the address below on or before February 2, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. All bids must be accompanied by a bid security in any of the acceptable forms and in the amount stated in ITB Clause 18. Late bids shall not be accepted.

All bidding documents should be filled out in the Procurement of Fuel, Lubricants and Other Oil Products for the Use of the Vehicles for CY 2015 and 2016, and (2) ₱4,500,000.00 for the Comprehensive Health Care Package of the Supreme Court for CY 2015 in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at the given address.

The Supreme Court reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders.

For further information, please refer to the:

Bids and Awards Committee for Goods and Services
(BAC-GS) Secretariat
Office Conference Room 2
2/F Supreme Court Old Building, Taft Ave., Manila
Telefax No.: 536-2013

ATTY. MA. CRISTINA
Officer-in-Charge
Office of the Clerk of Court
and Chairperson, BAC-GS

(PIA January 12, 2015)

BSP: Let rural banks gain from foreign investments

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG Pilipinas is backing a proposal that will allow foreign entities to invest in the country's rural banks, some of which are reported to be suffering from capitalization problems.

"Following rural banks is an orgy (foreign investment) will provide them more access to capital and better technology, which is needed to improve their services," BSP Deputy Governor Nestor Espenilla Jr. told reporters.

Under the law, rural banks are not allowed to accept capital from foreigners. As a result, capitalization is needed before foreign investors may infuse capital in rural banks, Espenilla said.

"There should be an amendment to the law (Rural Banks Act)," Espenilla said.

The Rural Bankers Association of the Philippines (RBAP), composed of over 600 rural banks in the country has been pushing for the law to be amended to allow its members to accept foreign capital. The group said addition, al source of funding would help strengthen the industry's overall financial health.

RBAP earlier maintained that the industry was in good financial condition, posting profits and registering low exposure to bad debts. Still, the group admitted there were some members suffering from lesser than required capitalization.

The Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp. reported in October from from 2010 to 2014, 170 rural banks placed under the central bank's "prompt and corrective action" program, 105 of which were found to be under-capitalized.

The 181 "capital deficient" banks had P21 billion worth of deposits, accounting for 46 percent of total deposits put together by the rural banking sector. Michelle V. Ramos

Trade blocs push passage of bill to create IT agency

By Abigail L. Ho

JUST MONTHS BEFORE THE changing of the guard in Congress, various business groups are renewing their push for the passage of a bill that would create a Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

In a letter to Senate President Franklin Drilon, the Joint Foreign Chambers Information Technology Committee on science and technology chair Edgardo Angara, the groups said having a DICT would enable the country "to become the premier global locator in East Asia for IT-enabled services."

Among the groups pushing for the creation of a DICT at the 16th Congress were the Joint Foreign Chambers, Business Processing Association of the Philippines, Contact Center Association of the Philippines, Management Association of the Philippines, and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

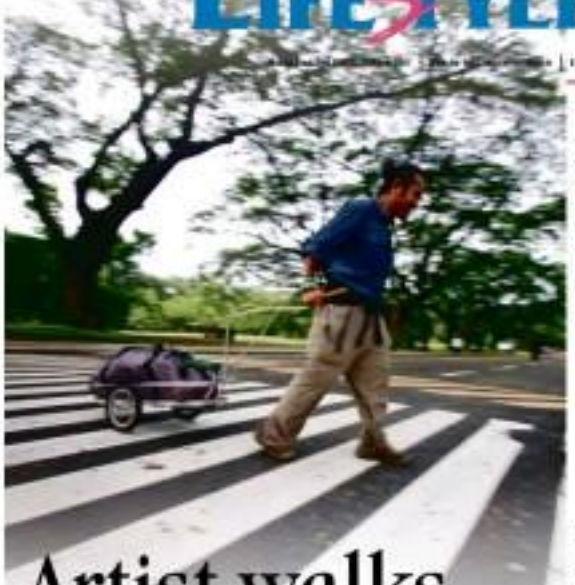
"The creation of a (DICT) can greatly speed up the process of the Philippines becoming an information economy, that is improving overall Philippine competitiveness. Other economies are competing with the Philippines for the attention of a huge global services sector. We must take full advantage of the Philippines' early-mover lead today," the Jan. 7 letter stated.

In an earlier interview, Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT) Secretary Rosalia Colombo said that while the CICT had policymaking powers, it did not have much teeth.

"We were created by an (executive order). A new EO can supersede our functions or can abolish us altogether. If we become a department, we will become able to perform our functions, and we will have sovereign structure," he explained.

"The existence of a DICT will not result in the ... addition of another layer to the bureaucracy. The establishment of a department means we'll not focus on all services coming ICT, and place them under one (department). All the pieces are already there, we just need to have a department."

LIFESTYLE Wellness



Tomas Leonor aims to walk 30 km per day, resting only on Sundays, for 47 days

TOMAS Leonor, on a mission to help cancer survivors

Artist walks from Pagudpud to Sorsogon for cancer warriors

By Anna A. Jamboro

THE JOURNEY OF AN artist covering 1,294 km by foot, crossing 33 major cities and 100 towns begins Jan. 11.

From Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte to Sorsogon, Tomas Leonor will travel with a rickshaw, hoping to raise funds and create cancer awareness in every community he will visit. Each step is a step for life, each footprint a trail of love.

Leonor has always dreamed of crossing the country on foot. A persistent wobbler, hiker and mountaineer, he met Cancer Warriors Foundation (CWF) founder James Arabe two years ago when he was part of the circumnavigating team for the foundation's fundraiser.

CWF focused on helping children with cancer, changed Leonor's perception of the disease as he listened to the children's stories of surviving and coping with cancer.

Leonor is not a cancer survivor, but the children's raise taught him lessons on how precious life is. Right there and then, he came up with the idea of walking across Luzon.

Dubbed "Step Asia: A Walking Expedition for the Children of Cancer Warriors Foundation," Leonor aims to walk 30 km per day, resting only on Sundays, for 47 days. With Philfoodtrik, Leonor will give talks on cancer awareness at major stops on his journey. (E-mail stepasia2009@gmail.com for info.)

Inspiration

"I'm nervous and excited at the same time. I've always wanted to do long-distance walk. With a good cause like this, my mission becomes even more meaningful," Leonor said.

Leonor's concept was inspired by Karl Bushby, who has been traveling around the world for 14 years without the aid of land, air and sea transportation. Leonor's rickshaw, made of lightweight materials such as aluminum, has been christened Glad.

Encased by Rodney Lwenng, the rickshaw will carry everything Leonor needs for his journey—clothes, tent, sleeping bag, burner and multifunctional stove, GPS unit, cell phone, MP3, shampoo and emergency food.

He will be dragging his rickshaw to insure the tents or his back if he were to bring a backpack with him.

The rickshaw is designed to survive different road and weather conditions—waterproof and tough enough to withstand more than 1,000 km of unpredictable situations. While it is constructed to carry up to 50 kgs, Leonor will bring a maximum of 20 kg baggage only as he will need to drag the rickshaw uphill, and on rough roads in some areas.

"Worse-case scenario would be me pitching my tent somewhere before evening," he said.

How he keeps fit

A lover of the outdoors, Leonor doesn't hit the gym to keep fit. Instead, he does stretching exercises and martial arts, plays Frisbee and runs up and down stairs instead of using the lift/escalator. (He does 50 rounds—up and down, two steps at a time—to build legs at 10 Odiamas, his alma mater.)

He once walked the entire Laguna loop of more than 100 km for seven days. It wasn't his intention to walk the loop at first, he said, but he just kept on going kilometer after kilometer until he decided he had to complete the loop. He then relied solely on the kindness of strangers who were willing to provide him shelter in the evening.

Leonor will be self-sustained during the entire "Step Asia" journey. Former students, relatives and supporters will be around to lend him moral support, but there will be no team as a unit, for instance, that will tail him throughout his mission.

Aside from the weather, which I hope will not be too extreme during my mission, I also hope and pray I will not encounter bald-tappers along the way," he said.

CWF has already inquired Leonor to get regular medical checkup during the entire journey. He is scheduled to hit Mandaluyong Feb. 3, where he will be escorted by the MMDA on his walk along Edsa before proceeding to give an inspirational talk. His mission will be completed Feb. 27 in Sorsogon.

What is your weight loss personality?

By Mitch Felipe-Mendoza
Contributor

RELATE YOUR WEIGHTLOSS personality with profiles of real people I've worked with. This will make it easier for you to manage your weight loss resolutions this year.

Overeater/overexerciser

Food intake: You've been used to eating large portions so you find it difficult to manage your diet. Even if you have plans of dieting, you often fail especially when you're with people with big appetites.

Exercise behavior: You engage in physical activities as compensation for your eating.

Weight-loss pattern: You find it hard to get significant results at the start, but there will be improvements like increase in body tone or endurance.

Obstacles: Since you have an extrovert personality, you'll spot stress nothing to happening despite your efforts.

How to manage: Start a food and exercise journal then see what works best for you. Weight loss is not achievable through extreme strategies and getting help from qualified weight loss professionals will be of great help.

Event-dependent exercises/dieter

Food intake: You are always influenced by the need to look great so you don't eat right.

Exercise behavior: You believe in the importance of exercise as you choose exercises that give faster results.

Weight-loss pattern: You can lose weight easily because you're driven by events you'll attend.

How to manage: Weight loss goals should be influenced by a more long-lasting motivation like health improvement.

Forever dieter

Food intake: You follow the latest diet craze that you switch from one diet to another.

Exercise behavior: Exercise is something you don't have to do.

Weight-loss pattern: You lose and gain because fad diets deprive you of real food.

Obstacles: Taking on strategies like carbohydrates will make you resort to sweets at night because your body lacks sugar. Your moods are unpredictable until you find it a challenge to be consistent in exercise and eating programs.

How to manage: Listen to professionals who can lead you on a balanced lifestyle.

Weight-loss achiever

How to manage: Eating your favorite foods once in a while but in controlled portions. Choose a flexible program that will suit your lifestyle and taste. Have set days and find time for loved ones.

E-mail the author at mitchfelipe@gmail.com

I got my hair back.

I look younger, feel better – unstoppable!

After more than a decade, acclaimed actor Mark Gil finally sports a full head of hair again. And he's back for more action.

"I started going bald when I was in my mid-30s. I noticed my hairline was receding. In my 40s, my crown area was thinning, and continued to advanced baldness. I lost confidence, felt insecure and became envious of men with fuller hair. It restricted me in life. I was conscious all the time eh. Nalalaki-hiaan ako," he recalls.

As a man in his prime, he thought he should be like others enjoying the time of their lives. "There were lots of things that I wanted to do, to experience them in full blast, without hesitation and embarrassment because of my hairless. So I bought 'thickening products' from Australia, 'ampalaya shampoos' from abroad and an expensive 'hair-spray paint.' But nothing happened.

Then I used those remedies, the older I looked and the more I was teased by my colleagues," he says.

Other men give in to boldness easily – but not Mark. "I thought, I'm satisfied with my face and body, but I want my hair back. When I learned that Somacon offers a non-surgical hair replacement procedure, I was convinced to give it a try. With **Transdermal Cosmetic Reconstruction (TCR)**, I got my hair back! I'm impressed! It looks perfect and feels natural like my own. I felt like I had never been bald at all," he adds.

With his new full head of hair, Mark regained his confidence and he's back on top of his game with no reservations. "I look younger, feel better – unstoppable! In fact, I even got more movie and TV offers now. I think my hair helps a lot. I do action scenes, play soccer, jet ski and swim with my hair. I'm not afraid to get it wet. It looks very natural, wet or dry. I am amazed!"

Mark is not the only one satisfied with how TCR brought his hair back – his wife, too. "My wife is very happy. She is like sleeping with a new man also. Mas gwapo sabi niya. Mas adventurous pa. With more hair, I feel I have more confidence and vigor. My wife is blown away!"

Have a full head of hair again and get back in action—only with **Transdermal Cosmetic Reconstruction (TCR)**. Call Somacon at 892-4247/234-0851(Cebu) now for your FREE private consultation today.

GARFIELD (by Jim Davis)

A. LIPIN BY JOSE ABRERA

PUGAD BABOY BY PH. JUNIOR

DICK TRACY

LOKMANOTS BY ELIZABETH CHONGCO

JAMES BOND

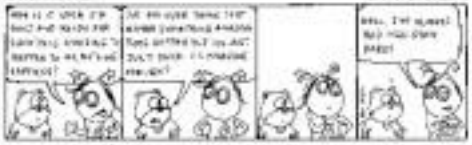
BRAINE COMEDY BY STEVEN PABALINAS

BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT

TULOOK BY MARK COLL

BEH BY DANIEL SHELTON

ATOMIC AND WEEDY BY VINA GARCILLANO

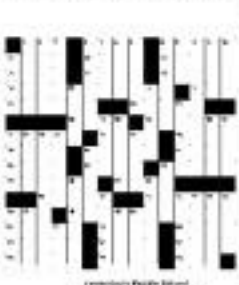


KIBO MACHINE BY MANDO ABRERA

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku By Dave Green

	4			8			9	
2			6		3	1		5
	7	5	9			2		
	5					6	2	
8								4
	6	3					1	
		6			9	4	7	
4		9	7		5			1
	2			6			3	

Difficulty Level ★★

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and programs at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

8	5	3	9	1	7	6	4	2
6	4	9	8	5	2	3	7	1
7	1	2	6	4	3	5	9	8
3	6	4	2	7	5	8	1	9
5	7	1	3	8	4	9	2	6
2	9	8	1	6	9	7	5	4
1	9	5	4	3	6	2	6	7
9	8	6	7	2	1	4	9	5
4	2	7	5	9	8	1	3	8

Farmer dreams big and runs wide

By Margie Baga-Reyes

From the rice fields of Lucban, Quezon, to Guam's Koko Road Race, champion runner Pepito Deapera has come a long way

PEPITO Deapera at Guam Koko RoadRace

WHATEVER your social or economic status in life, it should not stop you from dreaming big. Pepito Deapera, a farmer from Lucban, Quezon, once dreamed of doing something that would make his family proud of him or, at least, forget his lowly plight in the province momentarily.

He decided to run.

But, in between tilling rice fields, gathering cocoons and planting vegetables, Deapera would run around the farm. Every morning for at least two hours he'd run, pushing himself to the limit and testing his own spirit.

A fellow townmates and good friend, Leo Orozcos, the first Filipino to reach the peak of Mt. Everest, suggested to Deapera that he join different marathons to further improve his skills and overcome his shyness.

It's been 18 years since Deapera resolved to run and he has won a number of marathons, so his family's delight to name a few: Two-time overall champion to Mari Dumlao sa Dalyan Lucban, Quezon, in 2004 and 2006; first place Cape group 35-39Con Clark National Open Duathlon, Clark Field, Pampanga, in 2007; second place in Lucban Xcend Open Duathlon Off-Road, Lucban, Quezon, in 2006; and second place in Pan Filipino 100K in UP Diliman, QC, in 2009.

In 2008, he became the overall champion in North Face 100, the longest ultra-marathon race in Philippine history which was said to have pushed the limits of the country's experienced runners, by making them run around 101 kilometers in Hamilton, Batangas.

Deapera finished the race in 13 hours and 11 minutes. He said he had been training for 20-40 km on most days of the week in preparation for the 100 km race.

"I was determined to win," said the aspiring ultra-marathoner. "Feel relentless I rain or hear, I always prepare for the race and run my best."

For a while, he had thought he could only make his dream come true in his native homeland. Little did he know, the love was yet to come for this quiet probinsyano.

Run overseas

Two years ago, the Guam Hafeers Runners Philippines allowed to sponsor Deapera's trip to Guam, USA, to join in the annual Guam Koko Road Race.

"I got excited as I missed double hard for it," recalled Deapera, who'd train every weekend for 70-km for two months before flying to Guam.

His efforts didn't fail him. He finished first place overall in the half-marathon event at 2008's Guam race, setting a record of 1 hour, 18 minutes and 16 seconds. Deapera endured the steep and slippery descent and paths of Guam.

Last year, the 39-year-old farmer attempted to defend his title. Though he didn't make it to the top three places, he was to his age group category (35-39) against Japan and Saipan and remarkably beat his own record time at 1:17:21.

"I prepared for this race but maybe my opponents prepared earlier than time," said Deapera. "I'm happy enough to beat my own record. I will have to try again next year."

Prestigious Guam race

Since Guam's Koko Road Race started four years ago, it has been garnering steadily in attendance over the past several years. More than 1,000 people registered for the recent road race, with half of them participating flying in to the island for the race, including Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA, Australia and the Philippines.

The race coincided with the island's Micronesia fair at Tjan Beach Park.

"We wanted to expose to our visitor markets that there's more to Guam than sun, sand, surf and shopping," said Gerry Perez, GVB general manager. "Having a sporting event kind of ex-posure more to do that just lay on the beach."

Every runner like Deapera who joined the race not only enjoyed the run but also fell in love with Guam's scenic view.

Gil Guam Flores Bureau Philippines at 7277751 and Continental Airlines at 8300527 and 617 9600.

RUNNERS from all over the Asia Pacific region enjoy the course filled with entertainers, cheering squads and beautiful scenery.

TWO LANDS' Point, one of Guam's historical landmarks.

SCENIC view of Tumon Bay

What is karmic encounter?

(Part 2)

BUT NOW WE ARE ONLY FRIENDS. It's hard because we were both connecting our emotions. Or was it just me who felt that way? He just happened to drop by to tell me he was sorry for everything, for the pain he had caused me. I told him it was okay that I understand.

"But I'm really hurt because things are different now. I don't have him anymore. I hope I could really move on this time. I need to accept that it wasn't right for us to be together in this lifetime."

"Why did I meet him at this time? He left closer after knowing our childhood dreams. Were we just to remind us our meeting to justify our wrong love affair? I really want totalk to you more in person." — Ruth

Dear Ruth, there are several important things I have to know, which may be difficult at first to understand and accept because of centuries of mental conditioning.

The first thing I want to tell you is that you are not the only one who has had that experience. I have met a good number of women with very similar stories as yours.

Second, don't feel that you have done something bad or wrong. As Shakespeare said, "Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." It is our religious and social conditioning that make us feel guilty about falling in love with another person who is not our spouse. But this thing has been going on since biblical times. There will always be relationships like yours, no matter what religion says. Even Christian priests and bishops fall in love, too, and have affairs although they are not supposed to.

Third, what you and your lover had was not an affair, as commonly understood, but a "karmic encounter." These are two very different things. An affair is usually only for sexual gratification, or perhaps a temporary need for companionship. It may last only a day or even a month, then it's gone.

A karmic encounter goes much deeper than that. It happens when both partners have to meet their karmic obligations to each other. Or that a lesson needs to be learned by both. When the lesson is learned or a karmic debt has been paid, then the relationship ceases. And life goes on to learn new lessons.

Fourth, there is a saying I always quote in my workshops: someone who'd says, "If you love somebody, let him go. If he comes back, he is yours. If he does not, he never was."

You had to separate because you were not meant to be together in this lifetime. You yourselves have chosen this condition to learn lessons in life, in manner how painful they may turn out to be.

Be thankful that you experienced a love that is so pure and heavenly. Few people are given the chance to experience the same thing.

There are many more lifetimes you will live in the future. And in one or several of those lifetimes, if you are really meant for each other, you will surely be together.

The last thing I want to tell you is an seldom meet a person by accident, for the soul never forgets.

Your meeting this person was not an accident. The dream was not an accident. The meditation was not an accident. Your being transported to another person at the time you met was not an accident either.

Our lives are governed by four hidden laws of nature, namely the Laws of Causality, Compensation, Affirmation and Attraction.

Simply stated, the Law of Causality says "Nothing happens by accident," that "everything has a cause."

The Law of Compensation says that "Everything we do comes back to us, in kind, be it good or evil." Another law is the lessons in the Law of Karma or of Universal Justice.

The Law of Affirmation or Suggestion says that "Whatever you affirm or suggest mentally becomes a physical reality eventually."

The Law of Attraction says that "Like attracts like on the mental and spiritual plane."

A deeper understanding of these hidden laws of nature will help us to accept things that happen in as because we were, somehow, responsible for their occurrence whether or not we are aware of it.

There will be an HLP seminar on Jan. 19-27, conducted by John Reiss, certified HLP practitioner from California, entitled "3 Days That Will Change Your Life." The three "Toolmates, Karma & Attraction" seminar will be held Jan. 23, 1-7 p.m. at Rm. 308 Prime Point 1 Cond., Legaspi St., Greenhill, Makati. Call 8307203; Mobile 8206882; e-mail joinreiss@yahoo.com.

'Energy medicine' offers stress management, quick injury response techniques

BODYTALK ACCESS WILL HOLD 8 HOURS OF activities starting Jan. 31, 3-5 p.m., at the Library of the Buntrong ng mga Barrio, Silas cor. Quezon Avenue, QC. Activities include one on one healing sessions as well as day-long Access classes in Metro Manila and Batangas.

Combining elements of Chinese medicine, Western medical knowledge and quantum physics, BodyTalk is leading the way in the field of "Energy Medicine."

Unveiled in 2002, it has been taught in 39 countries to 18,913 persons by 120 trainers.

Described as wellness tools for everyday life techniques is designed to increase resilience, boost health, prevent disease and enhance performance. A sustainable healthcare routine that integrates well with professional care, BodyTalk activations offer a complete management which, done regularly, as well as quick injury response through its Fast Aid techniques.

When Canadian Dorothy Primm became a certified BodyTalk Access trainer in 2006, the instudiately thought of sharing the energy medicine technique with Filipinos. In 2008, the former Missionary General Commerce Missionary arrived in Mindanao came to the Philippines to teach into Access classes.

Over a hundred Filipinos in Quezon City Cluster, Iloilo, Batangas and Davao learned from her. The practitioners affirmed that it is a non-invasive, safe and easy to learn technique using only one's hands that yields has results in lowering blood pressure, relieving pain, calming down nerves, arousing stress, anxiety and depression, healing wounds, overcoming dizziness, migraine, cough and colds and other daily health challenges. It has a unique life-saving technique that can be used in health emergencies, even those caused by natural calamities.

Three young dreamers, three winning shout-outs

SAMSUNG INVITED YOUNG PEOPLE to share their dreams, opinions and ideas via the "I Imagine" campaign in 2009.

Students from over 700 schools and universities in the metro used their imagination and shared their passions through the shout-out making contest at www.samsungimagine.com, which gathered over 30,000 shout-outs in three categories—Talk (for emotions, ideas, thoughts, dreams, hopes and ambitions), Play (how life is experienced through love of music, sport, fashion and the arts), and Love (how bonds are formed with family and friends through shared interests and passions).

The groundbreaking campaign had over 60,000 page views, 22,000 unique visits to the site, 1,200 entries for the three categories and over 34,000 users voting for their entry of choice.

Samsung also collaborated with Bilibid and Hang, with winning shout-outs from each category printed on Folded and Hang booklets and sold to some Bilibid and Hang stores.

The winners of the Samsung "I Imagine" campaign are Isabela Martinez and Joelle Francisco, both from University of Santo Tomas (UST), and Phil Jasireh Dayupay from Rizal Technological University.

Martinez's contribution in the Talk Category was "I Imagine and I will make it happen." A Fine Arts major, she finds her passion in photography and graphic design.

How did she come up with her winning shout-out? "I just wrote what I thought. My inspiration for my statement was my dreams and aspirations in life. I'm the type of person who loves imagining things. At this point in my life, I have many things I want to achieve, and I thought if I can imagine them, then I can can make them happen."

On the other hand, music was the inspiration behind Francisco's Play shout-out: "I Imagine the world united in one beat."

"I used the word 'beat' to imply two thoughts that I incorporated in my statement—the beat of music and the beat of our hearts," he says.

For Dayupay, peace was the overriding issue behind his Love shout-out "I Imagine world peace in 3, 2, 1."

He says, "Just spreading the love of God to everyone would make a world of total peace in 3, 2, 1. It is only us who do not know what the real success of love is."

SAMSUNG Play Category winner Joelle Francisco

SAMSUNG Talk Category winner Isabela Martinez; Samsung Love Category winner Phil Jasireh Dayupay

STUDENTS from over 700 schools and universities in the metro joined the campaign.

What are dynamic lipo and acupuncture facelift?

IF IT IS TRUE THAT FACES TELL how stories, then there must be truth behind the efficacy of natural medicine and the use of energy to reshape the face and body.

Here are two of the most effective, and dramatic approaches to aesthetic and cosmetic medicine today:

Dynamic lipo

Liposuction is one of the most popular cosmetic procedures in the world today. Unwanted bulges and pockets of fat can easily be sucked out of the body within minutes. However, there are health risks and complications involved such as fat embolism and adverse reactions to anesthesia.

Moreover, graduates of liposuction know that a second visit to the doctor is necessary in order to smoothen out the uneven treated areas. The dreamwave-assisted fat breaking discourages people from choosing surgery. Of course, there is the medical bill to consider as well. But there is a natural and risk-free remedy available through the dynamic Lipo Medical Machine, designed by female surgeons and manufactured in the US. It uses external high-frequency ultrasound and held paddles which breaks up stubborn fat cells in the epidermis and dermis. This 45-minute procedure, called Cavitation, has the capacity to liquefy up to 500 cc of fat, which is then expelled through another treatment called lymphatic drainage, which stimulates rapid elimination through urine and stool.

After two pain- and scar-free treatments done seven days apart, results lead to a visible 4 to 5 cm loss and 5 to 10 lb weight reduction.

Beauty expert Mikaela Pellosa who inspected this technology, which is much like external ultrasonic assisted liposuction, explains that a five-treatment program can make one 25 lb lighter. But the best news of all is there's no need for diet and exercise.

However, modifications in these aspects can speed up the slimming and trimming process. For free consultation, call Dr. Marianne Simeon at Philosophy by Mikaela, tel. 814-2483.

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

Acupuncture facelift

According to ancient Chinese medicine which is 5,000 years old, there is an intricate network of energy pathways throughout the living body. Tapping this body map is the key to good health and ageless beauty. It is called acupuncture.

Dr. Kim Fee Pérez, a famous European cosmetic surgeon, perfected a technique, inspired by acupuncture, to remove fine to 10 years off the face. The latest cosmetic rejuvenation today is called Chinese protein acupuncture, which can remove wrinkles softly, reshape the face and plump up bronzes. Improved by Korean technology, 40 subtle but very effective wrinkle waves among the cosmetic world.

This no-anesthesia, no-surgery procedure done over a three-treatment package can remove skin elasticity, tones the nose and redefines cheekbones and sagging chins. A natural and tight structure of supportive membrane-level needles are placed in specific acupuncture points on the face. Any disruptions in the energy pathways is corrected, thereby stimulating the nervous and muscular tissues. The result: A change of body energy and vigor and renewed radiance. Within a month, youthful glow and lift are evident. That's because new cell growth has been stimulated and blood circulation improved via a more efficient lymphatic drainage system. This is where the passive comes in as a synthesis of the natural protein has.

Dr. Kim will be in Manila on Jan. 20 for a special free lecture and demonstration at Rayo restaurant on Jupiter St., Makati. Call Bella Pada-Mendiola at 895-8863/0917-8089890.

Warm spa remedy

From my home remedy book: Want an instant lift? Mix the following:

1 tbsp baking soda
1 tsp raw oatmeal,
1 raw egg white (beaten)
2 drops EGO (virgin coconut oil)

Combine ingredients. Apply to face. Rinse after 5 minutes.

Affirm today: "Only me."

Love and Light!

Batangas farm offers detox programs

THE DOOR ASIAN CENTER OF EXCELlence for Holistic Health, in Lipa City, Batangas, offers the gift of health and well-being with its detoxification programs.

Our body is exposed daily to harmful toxins in the environment and in our diet, accumulating toxins much faster than we can eliminate them.

These cause headaches and body pains, chronic respiratory and sinus problems, abnormal body odor and bad breath, allergies, insomnia, depression and irritability, skin blemishes, constipation, bloating and gas, which are symptoms of illnesses.

Detoxification cleans the digestive tract, purifies the blood and internal organs, improves metabolic functions, clears excess mucous and congestion, strengthens the body's immune system and allows better cell regeneration.

A recipient of the Spa Retreat of the Year and Medi-Spa of the Year awards from the prestigious Ascari Asia, The Farm offers three detox programs which include medically-controlled weight loss, effective digestive management and healthy gourmet food.

These clinically-tested programs rediscover the body's natural process by eliminating the cause of the disease before it makes people ill, using the skin, lungs, kidney, liver, colon and lymphatic system.

Programs start with Discover Detox, which includes a three-day, two-night stay in a villa or suite, a guided tour of The Farm, medical consultation, nutritional recommendations and follow-up consultation with a doctor.

Other features include a colon hydrotherapy session with colon massage, a 45-minute massage under the stars, a 60-minute relaxation massage, a 90-minute purification treatment and yoga activities.

For a more intensive detoxification, there are the Relax and Rejuve and the Regain and Recover programs, which run for five days, four nights and seven days, six nights, respectively.

The Farm also offers wellness getaways in the fall: seven-day promo, available any day of the week.

Day at The Farm is the basic package, which includes welcome drink, guided tour, 60-minute spa treatment (relaxation massage, reflexology massage, lymphatic drainage, earth facial, Kitchen Fresh facial), use of facilities, five-course gourmet lunch, fire friend analysis and yoga session.

For details, call 660-8073, 0916-884-8080, visit www.thefarm.com.ph or e-mail sales@thefarm.com.ph.

New food brands for the health-conscious

AFTER ALL THE BIG OPENINGS AND indulgent food over the holidays, it's time to start working on a healthier body for the new year. Treat yourself to some of Robinson's Supermarket's healthy food brands.

Healthy You provides shoppers with healthy and more affordable alternatives to common food brands found in supermarkets. Developed by Robinson's Supermarket, healthy You products are low-salt, low-fat, high-in-fiber and antioxidants, and sugar-free to suit different dietary needs.

Healthy You offers a variety of healthy products like Organic Brown and Red Rice, Durum Wheat Pasta, Tomato Sauce, Pure Olive Oil and Canola Virgin Olive Oil, Whole Wheat Sugar-free Bread, Sugar-free Wheat Bread, Double Fiber Wheat Bread, and Sugar-free Wheat Pan de Sal. The brand also gives a healthier alternative to the usual junk food snacks with its selection of Banana, Mango, Guyabano, and Pineapple fruit bars, as well as Roasted Pistachios, Raw Walnuts, Almonds, Sesame, Taro Macadamias, Mixed Nuts, Cashews with Spicy Mix Nuts, Red Elle, Toasted Cashews, Premium Mix, Raisins, and Lunghs. Robinson's Supermarket also sourced products abroad, such as Olive Extract Oil from Italy, Dried Prunes and Prune Juice from California, and Apple and Orange fruit bars from Belgium. It continues to expand its Healthy You product line to offer more healthy selections for Robinson's supermarket shoppers.

Healthy You products span green shelf tags which are either sugar-free, low-salt, low-energy or saturate, low-cholesterol, low in saturated fat, gluten-free, fiber source, or all of these, as endorsed by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute of the Department of Science and Technology. As such, Healthy You products can be found in the Whole Health Section, a special area where healthy products are grouped together according to their benefits.

HEALTHY You Raw Walnuts

HUNGRY on easy sharp bun.

Robinson's Supermarket aspires to be the wellness destination for health-conscious shoppers by offering shoppers a wide variety of products which promotes healthy living.

ENTERTAINMENT

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Julio Iglesias to tour Asia, Australia

MADRID—JULIO IGLESIAS WILL PERFORM IN AUSTRALIA AND four Asian nations this year as part of his "Starry Night" world tour, the Spanish singer's official website said Thursday. Iglesias, 66, will kick off his tour with a concert in Manila on March 30 followed by performances in Sydney, Hunter Valley, Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Iglesias, the biggest-selling Latino recording artist in history, will wrap up his tour with a concert in Seoul. AFP

Snap out of the blues, Roxanne

COULD IT BE TRUE THAT **ROXANNE Guinoo** frequents an upscale hospital due to her Santo-it depression? If so, hope she swaps out of her blues soon and starts the new year right. Chin up and cheer up, girl! Make 2015 a "perfect 10" year!

***

I missed the episode of "Showtime" where **Roxanne Guinoo** addressed unfounded comments about reactions when a contestant didn't hear the answer in his question about Anne Curtis. Not a lot of my readers are who are reachers e-mailed me saying that they got offended by Glungo's harsh words.

I heard that the Manila and Tribes fans Pacsters and Manilatorians feasted

ROXANNE Guinoo

announced the production staff of "Showtime" regarding that incident. There's a lesson to be learned here. TV can either educate or rule-educate viewers.

***

Ryan Agoncillo's offshore manager, Brad Ferrer, wants to set the record straight regarding GMA 7's offer to Ryan. "He's enjoying being given the chance to work with MMK, GMA and TV 5," explains Brad. "Since nga yung no-rule sa title kay Ryan na Unsolved King, He is honored and thankful to GMA 7 for the offer but we are still making them understand that Ryan can't leave and TV's Viva Cinema Channel.

There's no Joey Albert song I don't like. Joey, who looks and sounds so refreshing in every is excited about her new album with Viva Records, "Songs of the Heart." It contains 14 cuts—Joey's versions of his songs of select artists such as "Forevermore," "Mistik Na Kitang Minahal," "Endless," "You'll Be Safe Here" and "Kahit Saglan."

"I literally sold it a couple albums," she said, giggling. "Usually younger artists do covers of my songs. Now it's my turn to do my interpretation of songs of mostly young bands/singers."

How does he feel when she hears a remake of her song, no given justice by established singers? "That's not for me to judge," she replied. "Though it's always flattering to hear my songs live on."

Being a Pinoy music icon, what's her greatest achievement so far? "Motherhood," she said. "Winning awards and having gold records are nothing compared to raising kids. When people say that I've raised my kids well, then it can say I have done something right in my life after all."

To paraphrase a line from one of her many songs, "We remember the girl I called Joey! and we can still remember the good feeling her songs left us with."

***

Mimi Taylor, Katya Santos, Ehrwee and **Andrew Muhlen** will be repackaged as the "Four Power Girls." Nope, they're not "forbidden fruit" but their gigs/pictorials will take you to your mind's "Garden of Eden." The four former finalists are ripe for the picking!

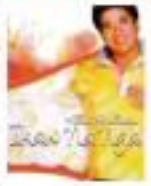
E-mail: asumingbalsa@inquirer.net.com

Willie overtakes Piolo in OPM chart

THE BEST-SELLING albums in the Philippines for the week Dec. 28-Jan. 3, based on Odyssey Music & Video's music industry experts:

OPM

1) "Ikaw Na Nga," Willie Revillame, Star Records; 2) "Grenades," Pinky Pascual, Star Records; 3) "Because Stunned: The Love Songs of Jose Mari Chan (Exclusive Mixes One Release)," Christian Bautista, Universal Records; 4) "I Love Acoustic Too," Sabrina, MCA Music; 5) "Ha L" Maria Herrera & Gary Valenciano, Universal Records; 6) "Music & Me," Sarah Geronimo, Star Records; 7) "Tilting Tilting," Willie Revillame, Star Records; 8) The Appetizer," Orbandido, MCA Music; 9) "Acoustic Duets," Hey It Says, Alpha



Records; 10) "Addicted to Acoustic," Princess, Viva Music

Overall

1)"Beatbox (Platinum Edition)," Taylor Swift, MCA Music; 2) "1000 Star Of Us," Sharon, Universal Records; 3) "Ikaw Na Nga," Willie Revillame, Star Records; 4) "The Fame Monster," Lady Gaga, MCA Music; 5) "Sweden," Dido

odyssey MUSIC & VIDEO

GREENHILLS CINEMAS
THEATRE MALL
PROMENADE
MANANG NO

Cheers to TV drama—and why is it called soap?

By Marinel R. Cruz and the Entertainment staff
Photos by Andrew Tablas

ABS-CBN IS PREPARED TO TAKE UP THE challenge of TV5, now under the management of Manny Pangilinan's MediaQuest, in upgrading the best viewing of its viewers, according to its parallel network Channel head Cory Vidanes.

"We are ready to compete. Even before Manny Pangilinan took over TV5, we've already lined up new projects for 2015," said Vidanes, who, with Entertainment head Linggit Tan and Business Unit head Deo Endrinal, sat down to lunch with bayanes Entertainment recently.

CORY Vidanes, Channel head

LINGGIT Tan, Entertainment head

TV5's goal is to "provide the best content for everyone, everywhere, anytime," said Pangilinan during the last Ad Congress held in Subic Bay. He announced that the network is going into movie production, and vowed to make more films than ABS-CBN's Star Cinema and GMA Films combined.

During the lunch, ABS-CBN chair and CEO Gabby Lopez and president/Chairs Ramon Gonzales came by. We asked Lopez if he was provoked by Pangilinan's declarations. His quick reply: "[It's] business as usual [for us]."

"When we compete, we go where we are strong, which is content," Endrinal said. "We make our own products and then all the markets that we want to penetrate."

Added Vidanes: "We have content that engages the viewers. [The drama show] 'May

LIVING 3-5

2009 House Calls

AT HOME and under the sun—what kid wouldn't want to spend time here! Cheri Mercado designed her daughter Christiana's room to be a welcoming haven, complete with fun on the walls! JONQUIN TABLADA

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FROM 'THE MATRIX' AND '28 DAYS LATER'
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DAYBREAKERS

DKD Sindhad, Business Unit head

Cheers to TV drama. . .

Pretcapa D4

Hakan Jr,' for example...are hour points on...doms the show in their sentence. We're glad to help impart good values."

Isn't 4656-GMA afraid of being raided for violent? "We're ready," said Atkinson. "Whenever's a new player, there's always a threat...[But] our people are well-taken care of."

Will you let TV5 borrow your stars?

Atkinson: No, that's no longer possible. It happened before because we didn't have projects for our artists. This year, we have a lot of new shows, so artists will have to choose.

GMA 7 has positioned itself as the first...reserve network. What do you think will TV5 do?

V: They have to go basic first. It's going to be difficult for TV5 if it starts with compliment materials. It depends on whether or not they get good producers.

What are your plans for 2010?

V: For the first quarter, we have seven new shows to commemorate the 55 years of Philippine Soap Opera. We recently produced Judy ann [Santos as] the Face of Philippine Soap Opera. Judy ann started the soap in 4656-GMA in the 1980s with 'Mara Clara.' It was our 'mga ate' to Channel 9's 'Maricruz.' It was also the start of homebound programming, the airing of Monday to Friday shows.

Why is a sitcom show referred to as a 'soap opera?'

Enabled: Procter and Gamble coined the...term. It produced the first radio soap opera in the 1930s. The longest-running soap [45 years] in America, 'In The World Tonight,' will say goodbye next year. Shows like this were originally intended for housewives, who listen to radio programs or watch TV shows while doing the laundry. In April 1949, P&G brought in the very first Pinoy soap, 'Gulong ng Palad,' which aired on 4DBS. It was written by Lina Flor and directed by Lecai Paredes.

Is drama really back?

V: It came back in 2009. If you look at the scorecard for years, 'May Bukas Pa,' 'Sigaw Dalawa' and 'Until This Song Ends' did well. Drama is really the strength of 4656-GMA.

E: It has had many permutations, of course. From the "soap opera" during the time of Judy Ann in the "Innocent" at the time of 'Pangako Sa'yo' with Angelica Panday and Jerome Ponce, then came the "Endurance" with "Mara," featuring Claudine Barretto, after that was the "action-soya" with Robin Padilla ("Daniel Kuzemo Ako") and then the "encoreyo" with "Bihirang ng Pag-ibig" and "Bihirang Walang Magsing."

V: The basic ingredient is drama. Viewers get very involved. When Gina Pareño character in "Dyesing Dalawa" died, we received a lot of e-mail. Even our TSC executives wrote, asking what happened.

E: Someone in a given...It doesn't have a drama without a love story. It's part of the formula.

You're celebrating 50 years of soap with our Claudine Barretto?

V: Claudine didn't have an existing contract with us when she got offers from other production companies. But she's still a part of our history. She grew up here.

E: When Judy Ann did "Esperanza," Claudine did "Hilda ng Pasig." Angelica Pan...de-day had "Sa Piling Mo" while she had "Walang Kapalit." Judy did "Sa Puso Ko Iingatan Ko" and Claudine did "Saan Ka Man Naroroon."

What's your plan for the morning slot?

V: Right now, we have "Showtime," [hosted by Vhong Navarro and Anne Curtis]. It has made a breakthrough in the morning time slot. But we don't want to abandon the idea of launching a new morning talk show.

"ASAP" is celebrating its 15th year in 2010. What are your plans for the Sunday variety show?

E: It has become more than just a TV show. It's a huge success. It's effectively a brand. It has successfully grouped together artists like the Itanes Boys, the Innocenteens and the Champions. Granted, the show has had ups and downs. There was a time when we lost Martin [Nievera] and Pops [Fernandez]. The key is to develop the talents you have. We took care of a lot of new breed of singers. We started with Sarah Geronimo.

Willie . . .

Pretcapa D4

Pascual, Star Records: (a) "I Dreamed A Dream" from Ruple Song Musical; 2) "Wishful" from Bebe, 19Os Musical; 3) "Remember Revised: The Love Songs of Jose Mari Chan," Christmas Masters Orchestra Mimus Our Sidekick Universal Records; 4) "I Love Acoustic Too," Sabrina, MLA Music; (5) "Power Hits," Various Artists, MCA Music

US Top 10 singles

The top 10 music in the United States, including digital downloads, as they appear on the billboard Hot 100 chart:

1) "SOS" BoU," RnB/Sx, RCA/BMG; 2) "Bad Romance," Lady Gaga, Schoenfeld, 3) "Payday," Jay-Z, Timbaland, 4) "Empire State Of Mind," Jay-Z + Alicia Keys, Roc Nation; 5) "Fireflies," Owl City, Universal Republic; 6) "Swap Chick," David Guetta feat. Akon, Jason Boroshevsky, Capitol; 7) "Down," Jay Sean feat. Lil Wayne, Cash Money/Universal Republic; 8) "Whatcha Say," Jason DeRulo, Beluga Heights/Warner Bros; 9) "I Gotta Feeling," The Black Eyed Peas, Interscope; 10) "Party In The U.S.A.," Miley Cyrus, Hollywood.

AP

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1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 ZOMBIELAND
4 THE REBOUND
5 AVATAR
6 WATCHMEN (Digital 3D)
7 UNIVERSAL SOLDIER: REGENERATION
8 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
9 KIDS PARDAY
10 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL

MANILA

1 THE REBOUND
2 ZOMBIELAND
3 UNIVERSAL SOLDIER: REGENERATION
4 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
5 SHERLOCK HOLMES
6 AVATAR
7 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE

METRO EAST

1 ZOMBIELAND
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 SHERLOCK HOLMES
4 UNIVERSAL SOLDIER: REGENERATION
5 KIDS PARDAY
6 AVATAR
7 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
8 SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL XI

MOA/ALTURAS

1 AVATAR
2 ZOMBIELAND
3 SHERLOCK HOLMES
4 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL

FORUM ROBINSONS

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 ZOMBIELAND
4 UNIVERSAL SOLDIER

STA. ROSA

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 KIDS PARDAY
4 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
5 AVATAR

LIPA

1 AVATAR
2 KIDS PARDAY
3 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
4 THE GAMER

CABANATUAN

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 KIDS PARDAY
4 ZOMBIELAND

STARMILLS

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 AVATAR
4 KIDS PARDAY
5 ZOMBIELAND
6 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE

IMUS

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 KIDS PARDAY
4 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
5 ZOMBIELAND
6 AVATAR

ANGELES

1 SHERLOCK HOLMES
2 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
3 BAD LIEUTENANT
4 ZOMBIELAND

TACLOBAN

1 KIDS PARDAY
2 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
3 AVATAR

DUMAGUETE

1 AVATAR
2 PREDATOR
3 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE

BACOLOD

1 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL
2 SHERLOCK HOLMES
3 ZOMBIELAND
4 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
5 BAD LIEUTENANT
6 AVATAR

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3 ZOMBIELAND
4 AVATAR
5 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
6 KIDS PARDAY

GENSAN

1 AVATAR
2 PLANET 51
3 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
4 KIDS PARDAY

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2 I LOVE YOU, GOODBYE
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WHITE ORCHID
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WHITE PALACE
WHITE SANDS
WHITE SQUALL
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WHO'S THE MAN
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REGENERATION

NOW DIE YOU FILMMAKING TRADE FREE in 2009? While many businesses had a hard time last year, movie producers generally made money, even managing to do eight percent more business than 2008.

What about 3D-animating projects for 2010? Progress reports are similarly upbeat, especially with Ice Age director Carlos Saldanha's "Gnomeo and Juliet," Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland," "Iron Man 2," "Sex and the City 2," "Tron," "Valentine's Day," and Leo DiCaprio's latest stalker, Martin Scorsese's "Shutter Island."

Shrewd Dominy Jr. awaits the biggest waves, however, as he's starring in both "Sherlock Holmes" and "Iron Man 2." Richest is made even more impressive by the fact that, only a few years ago, his career stranded on a bulk of bad movies and rehab is finally put a grip on his addictive and self-destructive demons. Obviously, he's pulled that difficult feat off, hence his successful comeback as an A-list star.

"Sherlock's Day" is a must-see, because it top-bills many popular stars, from Julia Roberts to Anne Hathaway, plus Ashton Kutcher, Shirley Maclaine, Jennifer Garner, Jamie Foxx, etc. The film is about a number of couples who fall in and out of love (and back again) in the course of the movie's composite tale.

Also an all-star production is the new musical, "Nine," with Daniel Day-Lewis playing an infamous lecherio and top female stars like Sophia Loren, Judi Dench, Penélope Cruz, Stacey Ferguson, Nicole Kidman, Kate Hudson and Marion Cotillard portraying some of the many women in his life.

Previous audiences have been split on the film's achievement, with some saying once it and others describing it as an ambitious mess. All the more reason, therefore, for us to make up our own minds about it when it finally plays in town.

At the end of the second "Sex and the City" movie, it's a no-brainer that it's going to end up as a big hit. The big question now is, will it top the first movie's huge gross?

Don't look now, but there's a much smaller movie showing nasty fun that, if it clicks with viewers, could end up as a sleeper hit. It's the remake of "The Karate Kid," now retitled "The Kung Fu Kid," with the mother role played by Jackie Chan and the kid played by Will Smith's young son, Jaden.

A couple of years ago, Jaden impressed viewers with his precociously spot-on performance in one of his dad's movies, "The Pursuit of Happyness." Now, in "The Kung Fu Kid," Jaden comes to life on an even bigger screen, the Great Wall of China, after only a few weeks of general torture, only the fourth martial arts picture to make more than a billion dollars at the box office—and definitely will sequel.

The movie's exceptional and can-do Dre's roles, introduced best as Holmes' new great enemy for the inevitable sequel.

Eddie Marsan is perfectly cast as Scotland Yard Inspector Lestrade, the professional who deigns to let Holmes fiddle in his section, happy to take credit when his amateur silly cracks a case.

The few playful put-downs between Holmes and Lestrade combine the wall-to-wall discord between Holmes and Watson, the latter closer to most out of their Baker Street flat as he prepares to wed Mary (Kelly Reilly).

Downey and Law have a pleasant, unsweating chemistry. Holmes the inspired loneliness. Watson, the stalwart comrade and caretaker. The story didn't need the artificial friction of their squabbling, a distraction in a film already heaped with distractions.

Jaden Smith in a scene from the film "The Karate Kid"

VIEWFINDER

Amador U. Arre

He's no Sherlock Holmes, but it works

ROBERT Downey Jr. is Sherlock Holmes

DARE IT FROM a LITTLEBIG PEN OF Arthur Conan Doyle: Robert Downey Jr. is not Sherlock Holmes.

That's a big belly, as he and director Guy Ritchie bring Conan Doyle's dusty Victorian-age detective into the modern world.

Enough of the trappings are left in their action comedy "Sherlock Holmes"—the lightning-fast reverberations, the encyclopedic knowledge of London, the compulsive single-mindedness, the rare one-upmanships—to make Downey a reasonably faithful embodiment of the figure Conan Doyle created.

And of course, this is charming, whose current semi-retirement—Downey's drinking made the most unlikely role his own. He doesn't look like the classic Holmes, he plays the man as a tramp, he's other laughs as much as he breaks.

But Downey does a great Bill, he lives large in the part, and he brings a human spark to cold-eyed Holmes that will help pack in huge audiences for a sharper run the Ringo since the Basil Rathbone days.

Drab plot

The failing of Holmes—and four writers who share story credit—is the drab plot they built around it Holmes.

But it's made watchable, even exhilarating in times, by clever chases and satisfies, a superb recreation of old London in its splendor and squalor, and the amiable interplay of the actors.

Jude Law lends the supporting cast as Holmes' colleague, Watson, Jude's hyperkinetic performance is a good foil for the more complex moments for balancing buddy bromance.

Rachel McAdams, Holmes' love interest, is missing but

Review

'American Idol' faces its biggest shakeup ever

LOS ANGELES—"AMERICAN IDOL" was the colossus that dominated US television in the new century's first decade, generating top ratings, a steady share of buzz and a handful of bankable stars including Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood and Jennifer Hudson.

"This is Stardom Hill," host Ryan Seacrest first intoned in 2002, and the singing contest that was a summer surprise turned into an annual dance with daytime power.

Whether it can remain in status this year, let alone through the second decade, is a crucial question for its home base, Fox, as well as the network's competitors and the seemingly bottomless well of aspiring singers who cast it as a shortcut to discovery.

Fox is a challenger for a series that, entering its ninth season this week, is undergoing its biggest shake-up yet with Ellen DeGeneres taking the place of Paula Abdul as the judging panel that includes Simon Cowell, Randy Jackson and, back for her sophomore turn, Kara DioGuardi.

Cast "idol" long in at the No. 1 racer, a spot it's held for five years among all viewers and for six years among 18-to-49 year olds, a demographic much beloved by advertisers.

But, said industry analyst Bart Amin Bill—for now.

"It will remain the top-rated show through this year," said Bill of Carat USA. After that, she said, it's a guessing game, especially if star-judge Cowell decides to exit after this season and "Idol" is deprived of his showbiz.

The show's producers said they are confident the judging panel has any what counts most are the "Idols," that favored term for the mostly 20-something contestants angling for a record contract and union, such as last year's winner Kris Allen and runner-up Adam Lambert.

Bullish future

In focus groups with viewers, it's about connection: that provide the most emotion, said Fox executive Preston Beckman, adding, "They want to see that someone and see someone win."

Definitions listings "outstanding unique and will be the interesting personalities shows and create an interesting dynamic with Simon, but at the end of the day it's not on their shoulders to carry the show," he said.

Gisele Paul-Cooke, CEO of series producer Fremantle Media North America and an "Idol" executive producer, said she's nothing but bullish on the future.

"Thank God it's an event, like a sporting event, so it runs above the

Legends Trinoma Trinoma Annex Robinsons Galleria Robinsons Magnolia Robinsons Cybergate 3D Robinsons Place Manila Robinsons Metro East Robinsons Galleria South Robinsons Ermita